

RETROSPECT

AN ARTS

AND LITERARY

JOURNAL OF THE

OSBORNE WRITING CENTER





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Dear Readers,

As your senior editors for this year, our time at HB has been a whirlwind of changes, good and bad, each revealing something we didn't know about ourselves. From the eager excitement of freshman year, growing maturity as sophomores, diligence and hard work of junior year, and conclusive resilience as seniors, we have immense gratitude for everything these four years have given to us. However, as we exit this period of development, a new horizon lies ahead. We're unsure of what awaits us next in our journeys, and cannot predict where our paths will take us. Therefore, we leave you all with a reflection on what we are leaving behind.

Our class color is blue, and we've always felt this color serves as a connection between our class and the water. We can take on different forms, but are united in the end. We always come back together at our source. We flow through obstacles, the power of our collective force helping us surpass challenges along the way. This connection helped us develop the theme of this year's magazine, The Changing Tides.

Each section in this magazine represents a different tidal cycle, with the pieces of creative work serving as a force for change. The first section depicts the Flood Tide, the rising water being the flood of ideas and messages steadily climbing towards the shore. The second section is the Ebb Tide, where the water retreats back from the sand, uncovering things previously lost under its surface. The third section is the Spring Tide, occurring when the sun, earth, and moon are aligned, allowing for the greatest amplification of the tidal range. Together, we believe this magazine represents the unified change that is our time at HB.

High school can seem at times like it will last forever, then before you know it, those four years are behind you. We invite you to experience this edition of Retrospect to its fullest potential, immersing yourself in the diverse and beautiful student works. This magazine will become a piece of history, art, and writing, marking the cumulative perception of this year at Hathaway Brown. It is with tender smiles and teary eyes that we leave the halls of HB, but believe our final mark on this school could not be commemorated better than by the collection of your brilliant, talented, and perceptive ideas.

The Retrospect magazine serves as a culmination of the challenges and triumphs of high school, and each uniquely creative voice, a splash in the water. Don't just wade in to your ankles, dive headfirst into this edition of Retrospect, allowing yourself to be immersed in the voices of your fellow students.

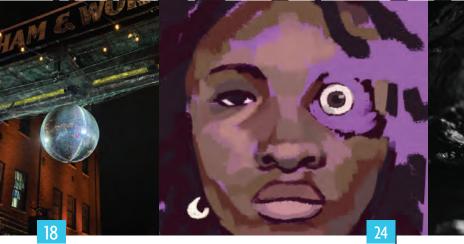
Thank you for all you have shown us along this incredible journey, and we sincerely hope you enjoy Retrospect 2025.

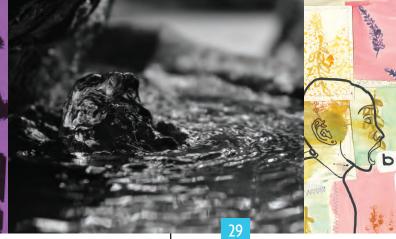
With much love, Your Senior Editors



Pictured, from Left to Right - Back row: Maggie Reef, Areesha Nouman, Chloe Eghobamien, Sam Boyce, Ally Hudson, Nina Hudson, Mishael Williams; from left to right, front row: Khadija Coats, Madeleine Burke, Paige Fluent, Suzanna Sleeth, Kate Hilbert, Julia Kubic, Claire Hudson. Not pictured: Elham Abdel Jalil, Leyah Jackson, Sophia Tully

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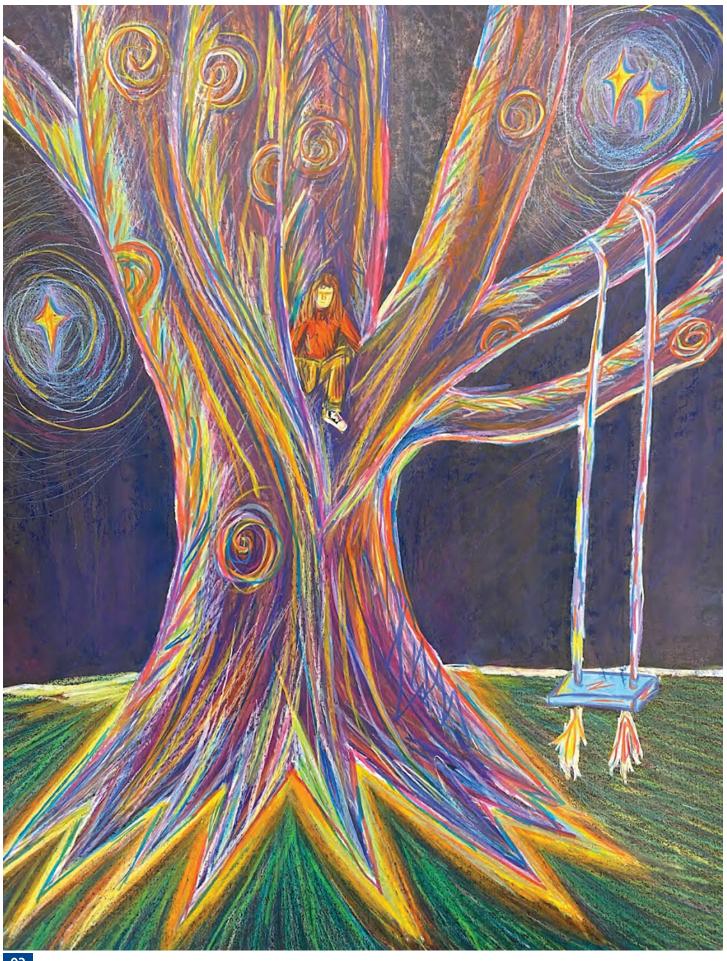
THE OSBORNE FELLOWSHIP in WRITING

The Osborne Fellowship in Writing and its programming is supported by The William McKinley and Jessie M. Osborne Writing Center Fund, The Horvitz/Rosenthal Family Fund for the Young Writers and Artists Festival, The Grace Wood Bregenzer 1927 Memorial Fund, The Peyrat Family Fund for the Young Writers and Artists Festival, and the Hathaway Brown School Colloquium Fund. These endowments support an atmosphere at HB in which student writing can originate and evolve. The entire school community is indebted to and grateful for the outstanding programming that has been launched as a result of this generous philanthropy, including the publication of this annual arts and literary journal. For more information, visit www.hb.edu/write or contact Osborne Writing Center Director Matt Rager at mrager@hb.edu.

Since its launch in 2014, *Retrospect* has been recognized for excellence in the annual Program to Recognize Excellence in Student Literary Magazines, including being the only school in Ohio to receive the Highest Award in 2016. We are thankful to AGC for bringing our vision to life. This year, 81 Hathaway Brown student writers and artists were honored with 133 regional awards in the 2024 Scholastic Art and Writing Awards.

To learn more about our writing program, please visit www.hb.edu/write or contact
The Director of The Osborne Fellowship in Writing, Matt Rager, at mrager@hb.edu.

SECTION I: The Flood Tide



Diocletian woke in a fruitful garden, the trees and bushes, plentiful with flowers and berries, encapsulating him. His hair was brown, his beard short. His eyes were murky, dazed. He stumbled forward, farther into the garden. A desperation overtook him. He began to run, tearing through the trees and brush. His clothes snagged on the branches, ripping his tunic. He finally stopped in a clearing, his chest rising and falling in an erotic pattern. A tree stood in front of him, tall and old, with the sweetest fruit he had ever seen hanging from its branches.

"Pretty, isn't it?" A quiet voice noted.

Diocletian whipped his head to the side, his eyes meeting those of young Philomena. She wore a simple white dress, matching her pure white wings. Her green eyes rested on the emperor, unmoving.

"What have you done to me?" Diocletian hissed.

Philomena strolled over to a nearby rock and laid down, resting her head on the warm stone. Diocletian stormed over, crouching down and glaring at the young girl.

"Where am I?"

"Dead."

"No, then I should be in Elysium, not whatever this is!" Diocletian shouted, waving his hand around at the surrounding landscape.

Philomena shrugged, closing her eyes.

Diocletian glared at her, his hands tightening. He turned once more to the tree, his mouth becoming dry. The fruit hung low and beautiful from the light brown branches. Slowly, the man rose and strolled to the tree. He reached out his hand to grasp the fruit. A gentle touch on his hand faltered him. He turned to find Philomena holding his hand, a somber expression on her face.

"Don't take it," she whispered.

"Don't tell me what I can't take," Diocletian hissed, pulling his hand from her's.

Quickly, he snatched the fruit from the tree, leaves falling down around him. Philomena stepped back, tears welling in her eyes.

"I only wanted to save you from yourself."

"HA! From myself? Really, Philomena, I thought you knew me better. I don't need you saving me." He took a bite of the fruit.

Flames erupted in the nearby rock wall, startling both. Philomena's face distorted into horror for one moment before falling into a sadly content expression.

"It's my time to go."

Diocletian ignored her as she strolled to the flames. She turned around one last time and looked at the man that killed her.

"Diocletian," Philomena called out in an authoritative voice, "I forgive you."

Diocletian snorted, taking another bite of the fruit. Philomena turned away, vanishing into the flames. The rocks closed, leaving Diocletian alone in the garden. He lay underneath the tree, eating the stolen fruit slowly. Birds no longer chirped in the garden nor did a tree branch rustle.

Sinner.

Diocletian sprung to his feet as he heard the voice hiss in his ear.

"Who's there?"

Sinner.

"Philomena?" His face turned red with rage. "Is this some sort of game to you?"

Sinner.

His vision spun as he looked for the voice.

Sinner.

Diocletian looked down at the fruit in his hand, now moldy and decayed.

Sinner.

The ground shook, snakes erupting from the earth. The emperor screamed.

Sinner.

He was pulled into the flaming earth, the sound of laughter and his own shouts filling his bleeding ears.

Sinner

The birds sang once more.

REFLECTIONS

All of what was, now just an echo of a dream A bad trip back through my favorite movie scenes Now I'm just saving quarters in the pockets of my jeans In case they stock more questions in the vending machine There's rocks in my shoes, ripping holes in the soles Leaves me crying and laughing, dancing on hot coals I'm singing quiet on the street, with that loose, tangled beat And the taste of Sweet Virginia, the melody between my teeth I'm taking photos of us, ones we'll probably never see Trying to save this moment, before it slips away from me But for now I'm really f#\$!ing sick of this rhyming scheme.

There's nothing more to say

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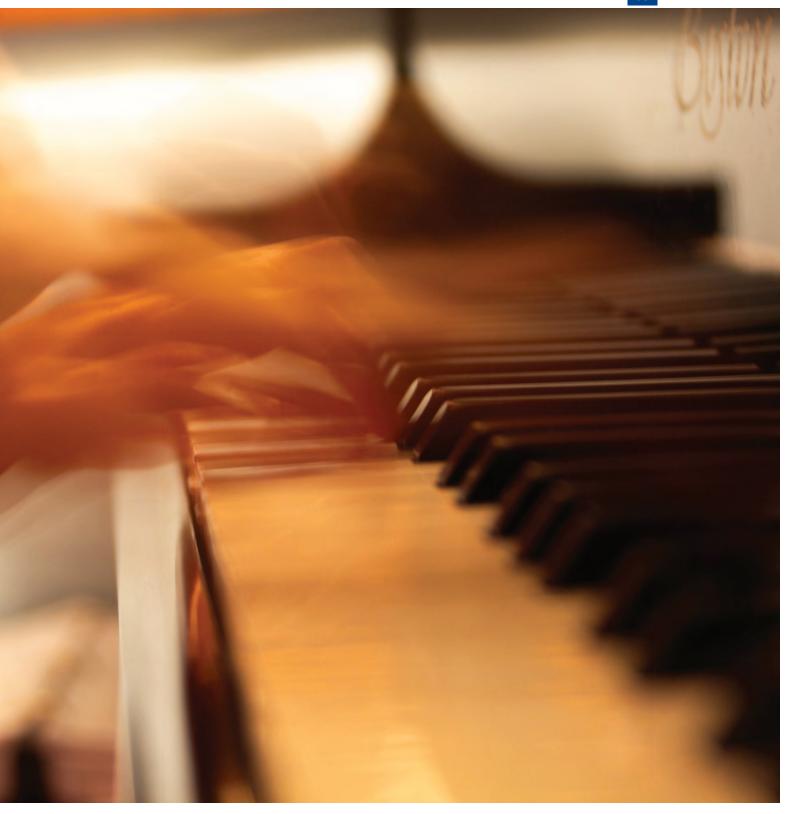
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ANONYMOUS

REFLECTIONS



03 *Piano* by Julianna Stahl '26



Of PRESENTS and PROMISES

CHARLOTTE LU '25

"Come on. Just take the bread."

The child's voice is a whisper. "I know what you are. Momma told me. She told me you were all long fingers and fake smiles and to never ever eat your

A pause. They sigh. "Why not?"

"Because if I did you'd take me away and I—I'd never see her again."

"You're not going to get to see her again if you starve to death, either."

A muffled sob. They probably shouldn't have said that.

"Did your momma say anything else?"

"Um." The child stops crying to think. "She said to never tell you my name. Never say thank you. Never make a deal or a-a bargain."

Damn responsible parents, they think. They can't blame her, though. More and more children have been disappearing in the forest as of late.

"Did she also perhaps tell you not to go too far into the woods? Especially at night?"

The child freezes. "No! I mean yes! But I left—I left my rabbit in there earlier and it wasn't too far and I thought I—I thought I could go get it but I got lost and—"

And now we're here.

Wait. "Your rabbit?"

A nod.

"You mean this?" They hold up the raggedy cloth thing they'd found on a walk earlier—long, floppy ears, dyed blue with woad—and the child's eyes light up with recognition, hands reaching out for it but stopping just short as they move it out of reach.

"Well, you can have it—if you eat the bread."

"No!"

"It's not going to do anything bad to you. I promise. And you know how we are with promises."

The child pauses, turning their words over to check for any tricks.

"...Okay. But I want something else."

"Oh?"

"Could you show me where home is? I'm still lost. And it's dark."

Oh. "Yeah. Okay. I'll take you."

The child gets up, taking the bread and rabbit. "Um... and... thanks."

A small smile. "No problem."

The child's voice breaks the silence, an arm outstretched and pointing. "I know that tree! It's got a little hidey-hole for owls and woodpeckers and spiders and stuff."

They're glad they've been leading them in the right direction. There is only one town near here, but it's nice to know they still remember where it is.

"Do you think you can get home from here?"

"Mhm! My house is right over there. The one with the red roof. You can't see it now because it's dark though. Bye now! I'm gonna tell Momma all about you!"

The child takes off before they can say that telling the mother about them may not be such a great idea. They resign themselves to just waving instead.

The Folk in the forest are dangerous. The child knows this. It's what Momma's been drilling into their head for as long as they can remember.

But they met one just last night and it wasn't bad at all! They got their rabbit back, even!

(They don't want to admit it, but the Folk's bread is also a *lot* better than the kind Momma makes.)

And they said thank you and nothing bad happened. Momma's always talking about how bad things would happen if you say thank you to one of the Folk.

Momma also says that if someone does something nice for you, you should pay them back, right?

Maybe they just want to see them again.

(And more bread can't hurt either.)

They've just begun to settle back into the quiet rhythm of the forest when they're interrupted by a voice that thinks it's whispering.

"Pssst. Hey! It's me! Momma told me not to visit you again but being stuck at home is *really* boring and also I wanted to give you this."

They take from the child's hand a fox much like the cloth rabbit—a bushy tail, dyed red with madder root—and run a finger along its stitches. "For me?"

The child nods eagerly. "Yeah! Do you like it?"

When was the last time someone had done something like this for them?

"...I like it a lot. Thank you."

A wide grin. "No problem!"

They don't know when it started, but they've begun to look forward to the child's visits.

They're still worried about the mother finding out, though. The child told them not to worry about it but they can't help but do it anyway.

"Are the stories really true?" the child asks one day, clutching a bread roll in one hand and their rabbit in the other.

"Which ones?"

This only gets an "uh" and furious thinking in response, which they suppose is expected. There are a *lot* of stories about the forest folk.

At least, they think it's furious thinking. They're still not quite sure what scrunched-up eyebrows are supposed to mean.

"...all of them?" the child finally asks.

"All of them?" they echo. "If we did all of them we'd be going on for weeks."

More thinking. The child's even forgotten about the bread roll.

"I... well, the first time we met you said that you'd never break a promise. Is that true?"

Technically, they never said that, just implied it—but they're definitely not about to point that out now.

"Mhm. Oh, unless the person I'd made the promise to dies. But that's it."

"So your bread's gonna be good forever?"

"For as long as you live, yeah."

They don't get why the child likes their bread so much. Maybe the promise did have something to do with it.

"What happens if I make you a promise?"

"Me?"

A nod.

"Well, I don't actually know—no one's ever tried it with me—but it's possible that you wouldn't be able to break it either."

"Okay! Then I promise I'll always be your friend!"

And suddenly they can *feel* the promise, the weight of it as it sinks into their bones. They blink. "Are you sure?"

"Yep!"

"...then I promise I'll always be yours."

Mouse? SOPHIA TULLY '25

My daddy heard a mouse in the walls. It started a few months ago, a year after mommy went away. My brothers and I would catch him on all fours, peering through a hole in the wall only he could see, tick tick ticking under his breath like the mice he heard pattering in the walls. He set traps wherever he could, in those mousy places where crumbs collect under couches and in the back corner of the fireplace. My brothers did their best to cover it up, collecting the traps while daddy slept over the computer he hadn't opened in a while. They threw away crumbled loaves of bread, sleeves of crackers that had been broken open and methodically placed around the kitchen by something human. "See?", he would say, gesturing to the piles of crumbs, "We're infested!" My brother said we were infested by something, but it wasn't mice.

I woke in the middle of the night to scratching in my ear. Was daddy right? I traced the sound downstairs and found only my father asleep on the ground, index finger twitching in his sleep and scritch scritching against the wall.

The poison traps got harder to avoid. My brother carried me from my room out the door. One day, we couldn't find our daddy in his office. In fact, he didn't seem to be anywhere in the house. It was only when I saw a bare foot peeking out of the fireplace that I found the biggest mouse of all, foam trickling from his parted lips, hands frozen in gnarled claws, empty poison traps circling his head like a halo.



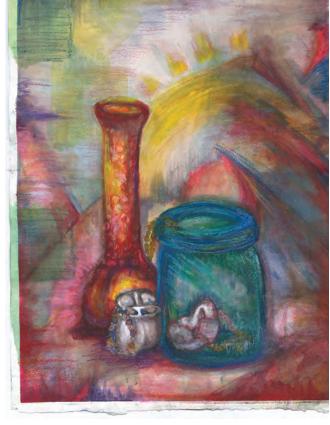




06



06 *Disco Ball* by Ally Hudson '25 **07** *Colorful Jars* by Reyna Verma '27





Many years ago, Béla Fleck, one of the world's best banjo players (banjo-ist? banjoneer? Let's go with banjoneer.) came to Cleveland to play Concerto for Banjo and Symphony Orchestra (those words go together as naturally as Dimitrov and organization) with the Cleveland Orchestra, and I was there.

Fleck sat in front of the Orchestra, banjo proudly resting on his knee. The mellow tones of the clarinets propagated up to me in the nosebleed seats. Then the distinctive oboes. The rest of the woodwinds joined in a flowing opening. Strings next added their richness and then the majesty of brass.

TWANG!

The lone banjo made its unmistakable entrance. The rest of the orchestra stopped as banjo plucked away. The orchestra returned and banjo tried to interact with its distant cousins, the violins. It did not go well. So banjo bounced over to brass. Again, it stuck out like, well, a banjo. As the piece continued, the banjo moved around trying to find its place to no avail.

After failing to fit in, banjo hid during the second movement taking a back seat to the more 'traditional' instruments. By the end of the second movement, something started to happen. Banjo knew it wasn't a violin; it wasn't a clarinet; it wasn't a trumpet; it was banjo.

And so began the third movement. Neither trying to blend nor trying to hide, banjo unleashed its twang and screamed "I am banjo, damn it! Follow me." And the banjoneer Fleck let it howl. Oh did it howl. Twangy arpeggios and strums commanded attention building into glorious runs with hidden riffs suddenly jumping to the forefront.

This brings me to my favorite subject: me. A perk of my job is I get to see you - banjoneers. I see you bounce around in class, on the field, on stage, in the halls, finding your sound. You still don't have it quite yet, and that is okay. You will continue to see where and how you fit in; sometimes you just won't fit -that is not easy. Trust me on this; there will come a time when the moment will require not just banjo but your banjo. And when it does, let your banjo roar.



Boats by Nina Hudson '25



Mords on Ware

SOPHIA VOVOS '27

It makes me uneasy how every other sound is drowned out,

I fear I may be too.

I stand with my feet on the rocks,

My hands in my pockets.

She calls to me,

A single note.

Erie,

Eerie.

Uneasy.

She sings to me in a minor key,

Her undertow the undertone.

My mother always warned me of Her siren sound.

Her flowing voice of pollution, mistrust, mistreatment.

My mother always warned me not to go in too deep,

Not to trust Her warm waves basked in the sun, to not wave back.

But the rocks are beginning to sink deeper into my soles,

And Her voice is easing my mind,

So why not swim inside?

Anklets of winter water, unable to

freeze just yet

Become a fully sopping toga.

I am a Goddess, I am a muse.

She is my Father, my Mother, my Lord and my son and everything in between.

She is an artist and I am Her brush,

She dips me in Her mouth,

Her lips sharpen my mind

She is ready to paint a song.

I float once my ears are filled by Her music,

The rocks replaced by open Earth.

Her music softens.

A hum, a whisper, a drum.

A hug.

Every sound is drowned out,

And I am too.



The only legend I have ever loved is my own.
They say I am haunting
this place, these places
But I think I am the one haunted
By this.
By this feeling
that I hate to explain
The endless Russian nesting doll
of a ghost in a ghost,
the ache that I imagine remains when the
cavity is filled,

When a scar from all those years ago is pressed by a soft touch

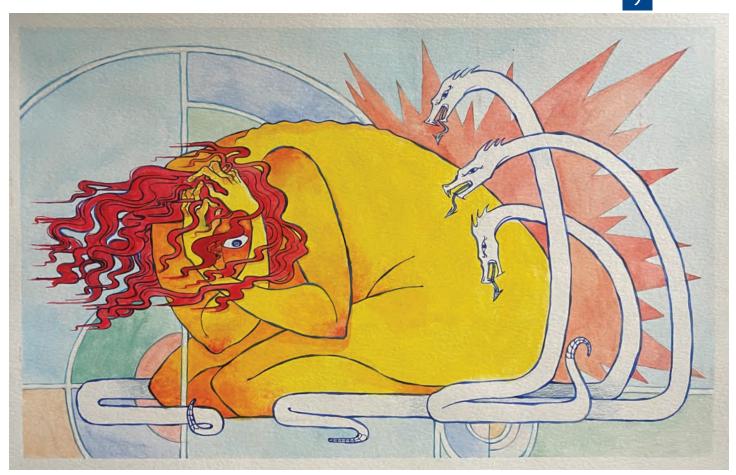
Trust me, I didn't want this either
Think how I wander these halls
They are starting to feel stale,
choked by dust, they seem untouched.
But people have passed by
They enter through the front door
too formally,
and tread lightly,
They know something is tied here.

I can see the thread, most can't.
Unless they are searching for the reason I remain.
It's golden autumn leaves soaked in blood,
shimmering in the sun when
the light of those moments breaks
Through an arched window.
Sometimes the blood runs clear,
and I can't see the teardrops
falling to the hardwood

The moon has a reputation of bringing back ghosts; it sets the room alight.

I think the floors are rotting

And the halls smell of iron at night.





9 Shame by Celia Bentrott '2510 Star-Girl by Jasmine Neumann '2511 A Single Thread in a Tapestry of Serenity by Ellie Tochtrop '26



This Voice This Voice THIS VOICE This Voice

LEYAH JACKSON '25

This voice is not mine. I talk, I shout, I laugh, I yell, I cry But that is not me No, this voice came before me It belonged to Malcolm, King, Fannie And before them, Turner, Douglass, Tubman I speak for those whose voice was taken Trayvonne, Breanna, George This voice It speaks, it shouts, it laughs, it yells for them This voice cries, for those who have lost theirs But don't be mistaken It still speaks, shouts, laughs and yells Because without your voice, where would we be Who?

Would you be Who would I be?

This voice it gets angry

And that anger turns into passion

For this voice, this voice does not back down

So I today am here with this voice, saying I am not done

I still have, THIS VOICE

And with this voice, I will not stop until the mission of my ancestors is complete

And if it is not me, then it will be the next, and the next, and the next

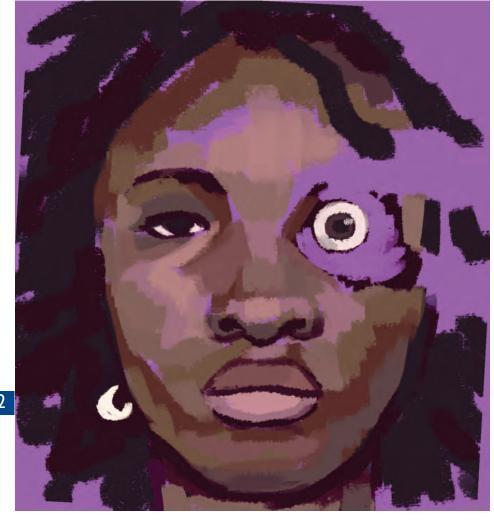
But no matter what

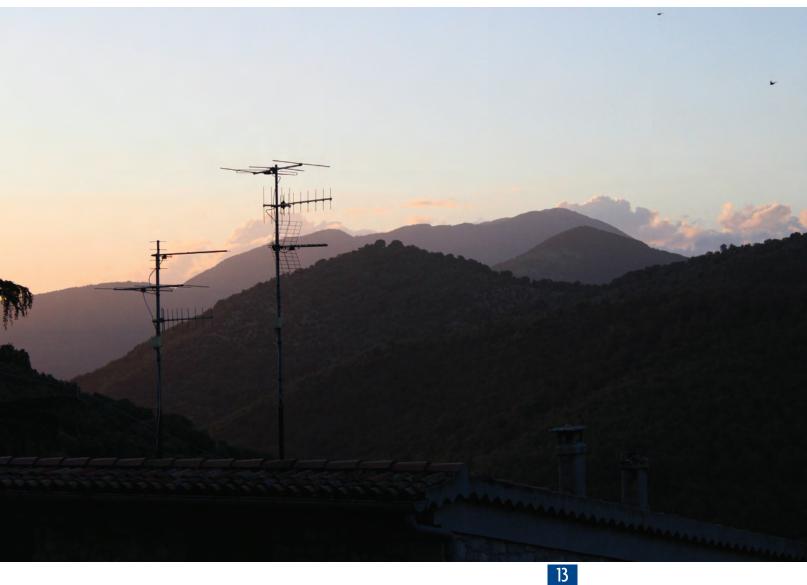
This voice will continue to speak, shout, laugh, and yell

Because this voice is not mine

It is not for me, no

It is for US.





A Case Study on School Bells

ARON NATHAN '26

The bell rings I pack up I walk to class The bell rings I open my bag The bell rings I pack up I walk to class The bell rings I open my computer The bell rings I get up The bell rings



- 12 Unfinished Look by Michelle Anabila '26
- 13 Hillside by Percy Milligan '26

And thoughts of Pavlov ring through my head



The Price of Perfection.

RILEY VALLONE '28

10 points. 10 points is all I need to make history.

When you're 15 years old and competing in the Olympic Trials, there's this voice in the back of your head that says, "You will never be good enough, you don't deserve your place here with all these professionals. Just quit, it's never too late." The thing is, I'm not quitting. I've been doing this sport for so long, it's a part of my routine. I'm worried about whether or not I'm actually good enough to let this sport consume my life on a daily basis.

I'm not Simone Biles, I'm not Jordan Chiles, I'm not Suni Lee. I'm Chanel Steelz, and I need to let the world know my name. How will I do that exactly? By giving the people what they want, not a routine, but a performance.

It's 4 days away from the event that can either make me revolutionary, or a disgrace. I'm currently practicing my jaw-dropping floor routine when all of a sudden, my hands start shaking, my forehead starts dripping with sweat, my legs start to wobble like I'm Jello. My brain isn't comprehending what's happening, so I do the thing I do best, swallow it down and finish the job. But, I can't. My body is frozen, it feels like I'm outside of my body, watching it from above. I try to walk, but every step I take, I get dizzier by the millisecond. My coach, Tia, sees my body frozen, and walks me to the bathroom very slowly, like I am a glass vase that cannot be dropped. When we enter the bathroom, I start breaking down. All the emotions bottled up inside come flooding back, and I can't control the tears streaming down my face, one after another, my eyes are waterfalls flowing into a river.

"What's going on with you Chanel? I've never seen you not finish a routine."

Tia says as she wipes my tears away, but it doesn't help, the new ones just replace the old ones.

"I'm not good enough. What if I don't make it? What will pe-people think of me? I'm a f-failure."

I look down at my shaking hands, cracking my knuckles to try and soothe me, but it doesn't work. I try to collect my thoughts, but the only thing that's filled in my mind currently is the thought of forgetting my routine in front of 25,000 people. I hear muffled voices around me, and I look up to see my Aunt Donna snapping her fingers in front of my face, trying to get me out of the trance I am stuck in with my own thoughts.

"She's having a panic attack, place her head in between her knees please." Tia says,

My aunt gently lowers my head to place it in between my knees and holds my hand.

"You will be okay, Chanel. Just listen to the sound of my voice, and take a deep breath when you're ready." I do as she says, and repeat the process until I can see clearly again. I look up to see my aunt and coach conversing, possibly about me needing rest and all that self-care stuff.

time skip - at home - 2 hours later

"You need to rest, Chanel. Your body's working overtime with the trials coming up and you're not taking care of yourself. How many hours of sleep have you gotten in the past week?"

My aunt keeps rambling on and on about taking care of body, but I can do that after the trials. Right now, I need to focus on being perfect for the

judges, my team, my coach, and myself. As I start thinking about the event, I start taking into consideration my aunt's wise words. I do need to rest, I'm not taking care of myself. If I don't get enough sleep or if I don't eat enough, my body won't do nearly as good as I want it to in 2 days time. I sigh very deeply, my shoulders dropping,

"You're right Auntie. I'm going to go upstairs and go to bed. Goodnight."

I don't wait for her to respond, feeling her smile like a child just won a lollipop creeping up as I walk upstairs towards my room.

"That kid is going to do great things someday." I hear my aunt whisper to herself as I slowly shut my door, her words repeating in my mind. Great things.

But what if I'm not great? What if I can't do great things someday? I think really hard on how I can give everyone an A+ performance on Friday, then an idea pops into my head.

And as if my phone was reading my mind, my idea's face showed up on my phone.

"What do you want now, Dylan?" I heard a scoff from the phone,

"Damn El, I thought you liked it when I called you." I could feel his smirk transfer from the phone and it made me shiver.

"Actually, I don't. Anyways, I kinda need a teeny, tiny favor." I tell Dylan, knowing he will say yes because he never says no to me.

"Anything." His breath is quick and his voice just went up 2 octaves,

"Could you, maybe, I don't know, steal steroids from your dad's office?" I say the last part in one breath and quickly, not wanting him to question why I need steroids.

"W-what? You want me, Dylan Rhodes, to steal steroids from my dad's office?" His voice cracked, making me feel a little bit guilty, but whatever gets you to the top right?

"Nailed it." I walk around my room, waiting for a response, silently hoping he can succeed in this task.

"Uh, hmm, o-okay. How much do you need?" I hear him huff out the last part.

"As much as I need to be the best gymnast on Friday." I pace around my room, my heart beating out of its chest.

"Well, that would probably be like 10 tablets. But, El, taking that much at once, it could mess you up, like, a lot." Dylan is looking out for me, but I don't need someone to look out for me. I don't care what it takes, I will do anything to make sure I'm the best.

"I don't need a lecture Dyl, I'll be fine, can you give them to me in 30? I'll meet you at the corner store on Hamilton and 13th street." I feel like I'm an undercover cop, my adrenaline increases as I start to feel better about myself.

"Ok. See you there Chanel." He talks very hesitantly, now I'm starting to feel guilty. But, I can't feel guilt right now, just strength.

"You're the best Dyl! Thank you, thank you, thank you!" I hang up my phone and start to get dressed to meet him.

time skip-corner store-30 minutes later

I hear a car pull up, and I turn around and see the blue Jeep that belongs to Dylan. I slowly walk up to his car, my hood covering my face and my pink sweatpants slowly dragging behind me. I look up from my shaking fingers to Dylan, seeing the tablets in a small plastic bag, then seeing a regretful look on his face.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" He asks gently, not wanting to irritate me.

"I'm positive, thank you Dyl." I smile, and take the bag from his hands,

"Make sure that you take them one by one or it won't give you the outcome you want." He says quietly, then smiles at me and drives off.

As I start walking back to my house, I start to think about if this was what I really wanted. If the only way I could be good enough was to cheat? That voice in the back of my head is telling me the things I'm thinking, not making me feel any better about the decision I just made. As I start thinking about what people will think of me if they find out, my head starts to pound against my skin, my heart starts beating faster, my legs feel wobbly, and I start to sweat like a grizzly bear in a sauna. I sit down on the side of the curb and everything gets blurry, then I realize, I haven't eaten dinner. I get my phone out and I call my aunt, of course, she's tucked in her bed reading *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. She doesn't answer, and I'm not shocked, so I stand up, and keep walking on the curb awkwardly, hoping someone doesn't kidnap me.

As I'm walking, I hear a car coming from the left of me, and I turn and see Dylan frowning.

"You need a ride?" I nod to his question and he unlocks the passenger door and I hop in.

"Thanks." I look out the window and stare off into space, then my eyes slowly start to close, and the last thing I hear is "Moon Song" by Phoebe Bridgers playing on the radio.

time skip - 2 days later

As I get ready for practice, my eyes keep drifting towards the bag. I haven't taken the pills yet, not because I'm scared that I'm going to choke or anything, but the thought of having to cheat my way to success fills my brain. I shake my head and think to myself, "This is the only way. Just get it over with and no one will have to know." I grab my cup and fill it up with water, then one by one, I start to swallow each pill down, and I can feel my throat wants to throw all of them back up, but I keep swallowing.

It doesn't take long for the pills to kick in, and at practice, I feel like a brand new girl. I feel more confident in my skills, and in myself. Tia is really impressed with the attitude and profound confidence I brought into the gym, and I plan to keep making her impressed.

day of Olympic Trials

As I'm making my way towards the gym, I see a long line of gymnasts waiting outside, and I see nurses handing each of them a cup. I walk over and stand in line behind Cass, a fellow gymnast.

"What's this for?" I point to the line.

"It's a steroid test. Apparently, some gymnasts have been caught using it and I guess they want to make sure we're not cheating our way to fame."

My heart sinks to the bottom of my stomach.

"Wait, so how can they tell if someone's been taking them?" I start to play with my hands, intertwining each finger around one another, I can feel my heartbeat speeding up like a Formula One driver about to start the Grand Prix.

"I think you have to pee in a cup and they can tell if you've been taking them within the last 72 hours."

The line starts to move forward, each step I take is like I'm about to drop into a black hole any minute.

I keep walking forward and I can feel water droplets coming from my forehead, sweat.

One of the nurses working at the event hands me a cup and instructs me to use the restroom. As soon as the door closes, I lock it and rush over to the mirror

I look at my face, getting closer to the shade of a ghost each ticking second. I breathe heavily, trying to level myself and calm down. I hear a quiet knock on the door and I jump.

"You doing okay sweetie?" The kind nurse, Cheryl asks.

"Mhm, just taking a while." I laugh quietly, hoping she'll walk away.

"Okay, well when you're done, I'll be near the entrance."

"Ok." I sigh heavily and walk over to the toilet and sit down.

time skip - 2 hours later

As I'm about to start my bar routine, I hear the judges whispering at the panel. I start to think about why they're talking as I'm about to do my routine. Then it clicked. They found out. They saw in my urine that I took drugs, and they're going to humiliate me in front of the whole stadium, and everyone will hate me for the rest of my life.

"Chanel Steelz, can you exit the floor and make your way to the judges' panel alongside your coach?" My throat tightens and I can already feel the looks I'm getting from the audience. It feels like a thousand knives stabbing into my back. Tia walks beside me and whispers, "What is happening?" I shrug and answer harshly, "How should I know? You're the coach." Tia raises her eyebrows, shocked by my behavior, knowing even on a competition day, I'm never rude to my coaches. We stop at the panel and I look up from my shaking fingers, and make eye contact with each of the judges.

"Chanel, we got your urine test back, and it has shown results of drug usage. Have you taken any drugs in the past 72 hours?" I hear Tia gasp and respond quickly,

"No. I've known Chanel for six years and she would never do that to her-"

I interrupted her sentence. "I have."

Gasps are spoken in unison, from the judges and Tia. Tia gives me the look that I never get, and I start to break down.

One of the judges speaks into the microphone, and I feel tears brimming my eyes. "Chanel Steelz has been disqualified from this event and any relation to gymnastics for the next 3 years for taking unprescribed drugs." Gasps fill the stadium, cameras start to flash and microphones start to fill my vision as I walk back to the locker room, sobbing.

I look to my left and see my coach, shaking her head and starting to cry tears. A sense of shame fills my body and my head starts to get dizzy again, the sweat on my face starting to drip down. As I recall the events that just occurred 5 minutes ago, I realize something.

So that's the price of perfection.







- 14 *Turtles* by Suzanna Sleeth '2515 *Water* by Julianna Stahl '26



CEAN

CLAIRE HUDSON '25 When they asked why I love the ocean, I said, it has a purpose. The water isn't afraid to touch you— Even when it comes crashing down.

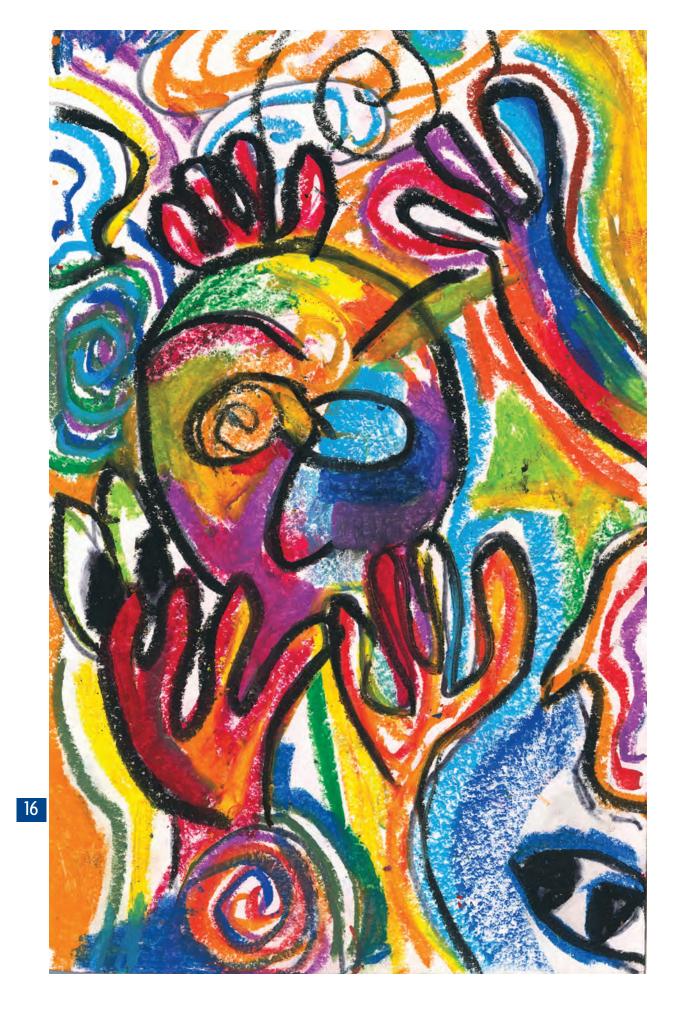
> And in that chaos, I felt safe. The Earth goes quiet. Sparkles dance along the shore, As the sun gleams above, A broken shell spread thin Into a million pieces.

You describe yourself in a somber wave, But don't hold yourself back— The wave never held you. Become who you were meant to be.

The ocean flows endlessly



15



Bouquet of Burden

Only now

When the hourly chimes sound:

"Too late!"

When the time to act

Has passed you by

Do you seem to fuss

Begin to recognize

All the tricks you've played,

Like a sickly plague you unleashed upon

my mind.

I arrive in your court with gifts

Offering you one last chance to rectify

your 'truth'

Admit your narrative is counterfeit.

My saccharine smile and sweet song,

Cause enough for your sudden concern?

How foolish of me,

To think my enthusiasm might be returned.

No matter,

Perhaps my gifts will lift some of the gloom.

Oh how it looms!

I see your scrutiny

An effort to dissect

The chaos in my head

I'm not sure I'd tell you

Even if I could

Even if I, myself understood.

I fear I am too far gone

Lest my soul be saved by anyone,

To reverse the effects

Of your omissions, your neglect.

Trapped in my thoughts,

A victim of chaos you so selfishly sought.

But fret not your majesties,

For I assure you

Despite the lunacy now attached to my name

In moments of lucidity,

I remember quite well

That you're to blame.

I'll spare you the pain

Of publicly dishonoring your fame.

Instead, I bring you a bountiful bouquet

Each feeble stem,

Reference to a quality you sustain.

Pansies and Rosemary

For your thoughts, of course.

For your knowledge of the narrative,

The story you refused to share

Allowing my questions to fester,

Eat away my sanity

Bite after bite

Never satisfied.

I spin before you,

Deluded, deranged

A rabid young deer

Much too crazed to tame.

Absent of my inhibition,

I hope you'll remember

How your lies

Drove me to the brink,

Deprived me of any peace of mind.

Perhaps your own sanctity

Suddenly seems a greater treasure.

With a flourish,

I offer you fennel.

Then columbine

Proof of loyalty,

Denmark and I's foolish worship of thine.

My crazed laugh disturbs you,

Yet it is all can do

To cope with the knowledge

That I had the folly to trust in you.

My collection of stems has grown sparse, But before I return to the brook To sit beneath willow, Where I'll shield myself from your scrutinous looks,

I shall bid you adieu.

KATE HILBERT '25

My final token?

Daisies and rue.

I need not explain

My choice in parting gift

Surely nobility such as yourselves

Can comprehend its greater significance.

While you would prefer to feign denial,

I have to come to lack any regard

For you and your wishes.

Instead, I press the fresh, delicate petals

Against your cold, cracked flesh

We both know

That your sins,

Corruption of my innocence,

Your deception of those closest,

Are grounds for infinite regret.

Had you told me

That madness

Beeth cause enough

For you to pay me mind,

I'd have lost mine long ago.

But as my time has elapsed,

I'll traipse back to the willow.

16 Crazy Guy by Reyna Verma '27



of Being Tall and Seeing Beyond the Grass

SYLVIA SWAI '27

The world around me is big and bright, alive with colors that stretch far beyond my reach. The warm soil kisses my feet, the sun strokes my head, and the breeze hums softly through blades of grass that tower above me. When I look up, I see trees that scrape the sky, birds that dance among their branches, and clovers that bloom as if the earth is whispering secrets. But when I look forward, all I see is the path ahead and the silky grass trailing behind me as I walk, and walk... and walk.

I'm small. Or maybe I'm big, and the world is just much, much bigger. But I feel small because everything else—everyone else—is impossibly large. Now if I were big, surely I wouldn't feel so small.

When you're small, you don't get a say in anything. When you speak, the world doesn't stop to listen. You're supposed to be quiet, to stay out of the way. Sometimes I wonder if, by some miracle, I could grow. Maybe if I tried enough I would sprout little legs behind me that would grow, and grow, and grow.

I imagine what it would be like to be tall. To stride across fields in just a few steps, to speak and be heard, to have a presence that commands respect. If I were tall, no one could squash me underfoot. No one could ignore me.

But then again, I'm proud of being small. How beautiful is it to hide behind blades of grass and find solace in their shade. To feel full from fallen crumbs or drops of dew. Because If I were tall, I'd look up and see *only* the sky.

Being big, I think, makes you forget. It narrows your vision. You forget how big the world is when you only look straight ahead. I guess it's easy to get distracted by the blue of the sky and step on bugs— just because we're not big enough to bother to look down.

From where I stand, I see them pluck the ripest fruits from the trees, leaving the bruised and broken ones to rot and fall. I wait for those fallen fruits because with little legs, you don't get to choose. I watch them stretch their long legs across the land, crossing hills I can only imagine. They speak of mist and of mountains, of things I'll never know.

When you're big, you see everything as something to grab, something to take. You see the sky and the hills, but not the ones walking beneath you. The ones you step on. The ones you silence.

But the world is brighter and bigger for the small, even if we don't get to hold it. I've learned that being small isn't a flaw—it's the beginning of seeing what the big don't.

So the next time you walk—stride or stumble, tall or small—please, remember to look down. You might see me there, tucked beneath the grass, still walking my own endless path. If you do, stop to listen.





17 Elephants by Paige Fluent '25

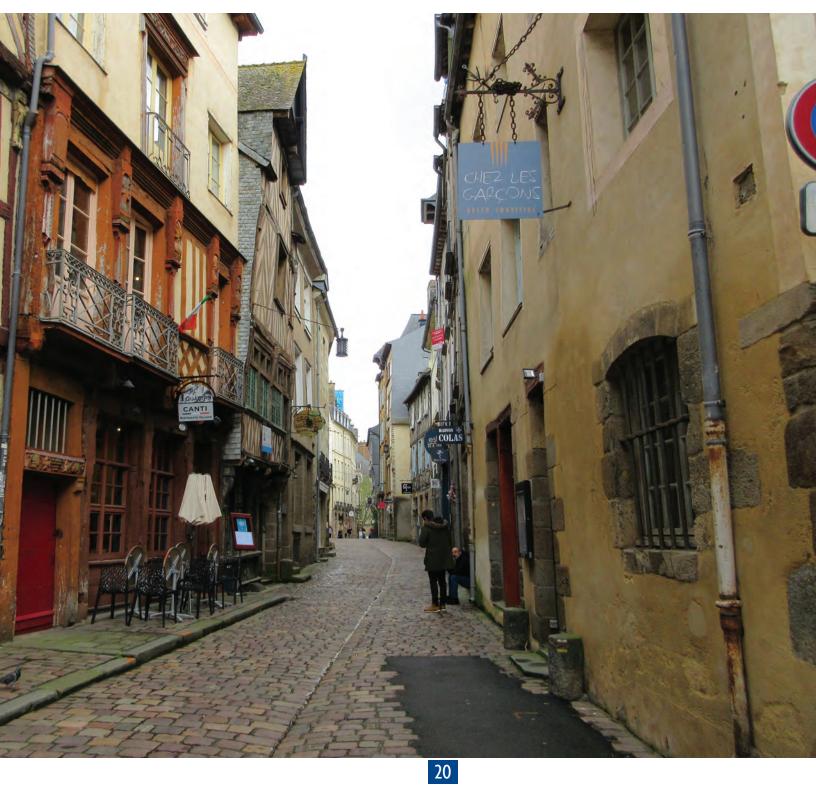








19



- 18 Dusk by Kate Hilbert '2519 Neon by Ella Daly '2520 Old Town by Suzanna Sleeth '25



It's Been a While

EMMA YOUNG '26

It's been a while since I've been in the kitchen. The soft sun, not yet strong enough to intimidate the morning chill, accompanied by the chitter of birds and crickets imitating wildlife from the night before. The dishwasher ready to be unloaded, leaving glasses to dry on the rack as the remains of last night's party sit in the sink, ready to replace the first half of the night, absent in the fresh round of dishes.

Kids that had woken up half an hour ago, blinking away in uncertainty, as if it was morning through the haze of sleep, attached to teddy bears and toy cars that ground them to reality. They walk around the kitchen, one of the few moments in silence, whispering for food not in an attempt to keep everyone else asleep but because the morning spirit has yet to allow them to be awake. Breaking through the hard surface, watching an expected dollop fall in the glass bowl, numerous yolks swaying left and right, flashbacks to the finer moments of peace that lay in domesticity.

A few hours have yet to pass before the sun properly hangs in the sky, startling all the night critters that fell slave to lively conversation, not ready to let go of the once-per-occasion atmosphere, gentle lights in the night, joy wafting around and swerving through the crowd serving rations of joie de vivre. The kids will have long since left behind their sleepy steps, chirping for conversation, as everyone else startles, having drank too much and slept too little for the next day.

I don't know how to bring out the intimacy of the circus-like tent, a recent tradition that's made itself welcome past its less meaningful origins, or describe the excitement of being old enough take a sip of alcohol yet high running solely off the adrenaline through intentions, the pleasure of being surrounded by those who cherish the stupid but still praise for the smart, adults allowed to be children and respect that still made its way round.



21 Spilling out of mason jar by Tarunika Saravanan '2622 Docked Boat by Nina Hudson '25





there's nothing quite like living in a world spun of lies.

not the pretty little lies, the ones all wrapped up in shiny ribbon and topped with a pink bow, sprinkled with sweet smiles and forgotten sentiments. and not the harmless white lies either, the ones laced with sweet afterthoughts and fickle promises, the ones well-intentioned. i'm talking *lies*. ugly lies. the kinds of lies that anguish you, that seep into every fiber of your being, that slowly, slowly consume you until you wither and waste away into simply a shell of who you once were. the kinds of lies that blur your world. *what is real*?

everything in this house lies. it's like the rapid panicked footsteps up the stairs, the hasty excuses, the door-slamming, seeps into the world around me, around us. nothing is spared from dishonesty. even the washing machine says 30 minutes and then takes an hour instead. on nights i stay up late to put my clothes in the dryer, i find myself standing there like an idiot, defeated, in the darkness of the laundry room, the sinister little blue light of the washer dial lighting up my face with each blinking second. it's laughing at me. i know it is. on weekend afternoons i go downstairs to wash strawberries in the kitchen sink and i take a bite out of the most perfect one, the pretty, shiny, perfectly shaped one with every seed intact, only to find that it's sour. it's disgusting. and i stand there in the unbearably bright kitchen light, with my head in my hands, even though the strawberries aren't even a big deal. because it's not about the stupid strawberries. it's like deception trickles into everything – every tiny grain of salt in the frosty, metallic salt shaker, every speck of dust that flies up into the air whenever i lift up my mother's cardigans out of her closet, every hour i spend alone, questioning. everything turns scary and threatening and wrong. everything is.

but it's fine, i tell myself. it's all fine. i tell myself that it's all fine and it's all normal but i'd be lying if i said i didn't hate the lies. every word i say is one out of fear – fear of saying the wrong thing, of telling the wrong story, of being the wrong person or doing the wrong thing or proving the wrong truth. wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong. in a world built on lies, in a beautiful home built of lies, the only thing you can ever be, that you can ever hope to be, is wrong. nothing you do, nothing you say, can satisfy the insatiable hunger, the unfulfilled yearning, for more and more to fuel the Lie around me, around you, around us. every lie, from where to why to when, digs us all deeper and deeper into a pit of delusion. yes, it's all fine. it's all good. it's all happy. everything is all fine and good and happy but at the same time nothing is. that's the beauty of lies. *nothing is*.

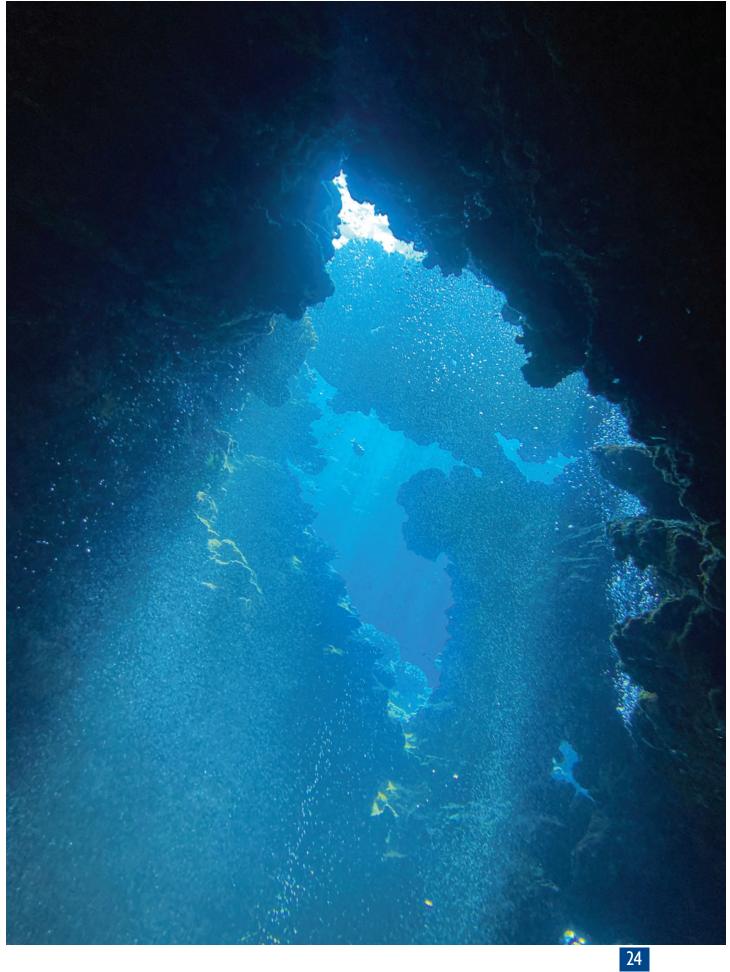
but you can pretend to be fine. you can pretend to be fine as the lies slowly crack you, slowly chip away at the little pieces of you and leave them scattered on the floor without picking them up. you can let them shatter you, innumerable shards of glass pointing upwards on the cold hallway tile, as the blood trickles from your elbows and knees. you can pretend to be fine as you feel yourself breaking under the pressure, as you realize that you're not nearly as strong enough as you hoped to be. as you wanted to be. as you need to be. you can pretend to be fine as you desperately long for a home, for a life, where you just didn't have to calculate every step, premeditate every choice, work so hard to lie but dodge the lies at the same time. it's painful. it's harrowing. but you still pretend. you still live in your little home built on lies as you lie to not just everyone around you, but yourself, lying and lying about lying and lying about being fine. because once you start, you can never stop. it's a vicious cycle. it's never-ending. everything and nothing is real.

but oh, it's just too, too easy to let it get to me. i can tell you to pretend, to try and ignore the fact that you're shattered, but i simply can't. i won't. i'm not strong enough. the ugly lies, the ones that have withered and wasted me away, snake their vicious tendrils into the corners of my mind, the folds of my brain, until all i see is nothing. so now, as i lay here, i lay here helpless. desperate. defeated.

but you know what else?

in my anguish, in my desperation, in my pain, i lay here smiling. i lay here smiling because i have resigned. because i have lied the lies and heard the lies and lived the lies until i can no more. as i close my eyes, i imagine the lies building up tall towers and wide terraces, crystal windows and winding staircases. and as the very essence of my being continues to wither, as i feel the parts and pieces of me fading away, i lay here, a soft smile etched upon my face, because i am home, home in my pretty little castle of lies.







24 Sport Diver by Suzanna Sleeth '2525 Ocean Town by Kate Hilbert '25



The sun dances with shame,

burning in agony.

Pain.

Its rays remain still,

but the unwavering pressure aggravates its mood, It shouldn't.

Fluctuating between torture and ease.

It wouldn't.

Certain its disposition is injurious.

The sun dances with shame, feeling confined by its own piercing gaze. A prisoner to the established routine set in place by the rotation of planets. Planets that adorn themselves in orbital rings and gravitational ropes, which the sun itself does not have. Instead, the sun is round and flamed with an intense surge of emotions trapped within, cradled by its own weight.

The sun cannot escape.

It dwells,

forced to persist,

otherwise, risking the demise of order, balance, and assembly.

The sun dances with shame.

It aches to retire.

It follows

and follows

and follows.

But oh, how much longer.





Oh, Cursed Pygmalion!

NAISHA KESARI '27

Wild eyes dilute the reflection of beauty that can only be carved from ivory. Flesh and bone can never compare to stone, compressed and solidified yet still yielding to the chisel, its beauty revealed through dust and rubble and meticulous angles.

Inimitable smiles can only be unearthed with a brush or a chisel. The paragon of perfection crafted with careful motions of the hands.

The sculptor's eyes grow dull as those ivory ones open a chasm, no longer releasing caked up dust, swallowing him whole.

Bedtime Story



through a child's eyes moths are the ghosts of butterflies

night beasts searching for the light even through the afterlife

a seed swallowed sojourns in your stomach and stays until spring

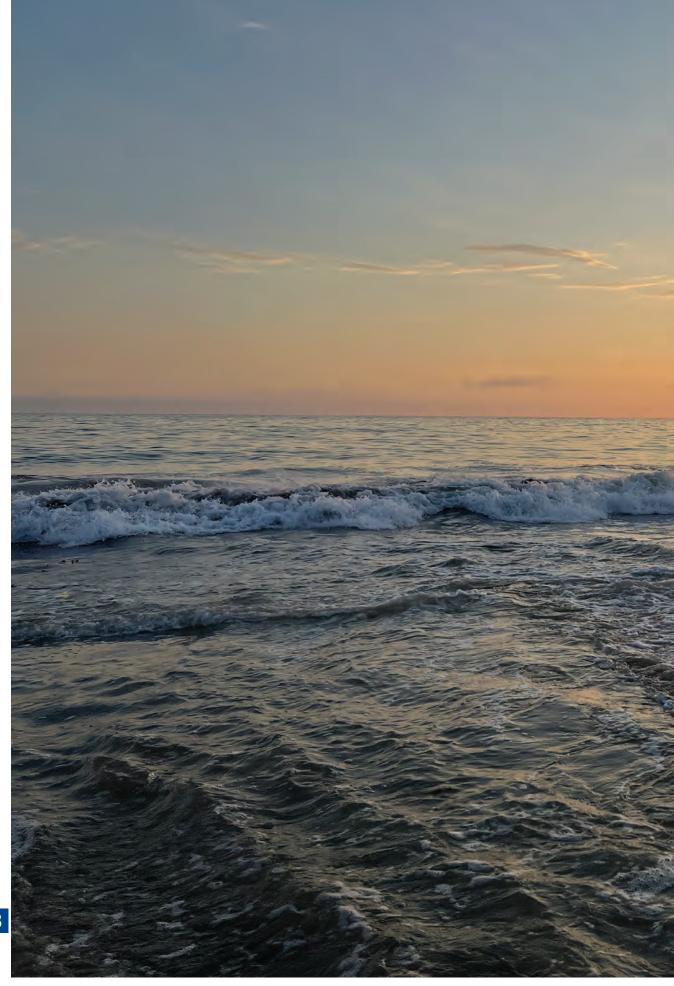
fruits and flowers blossoming climb through the throat and soil your lips

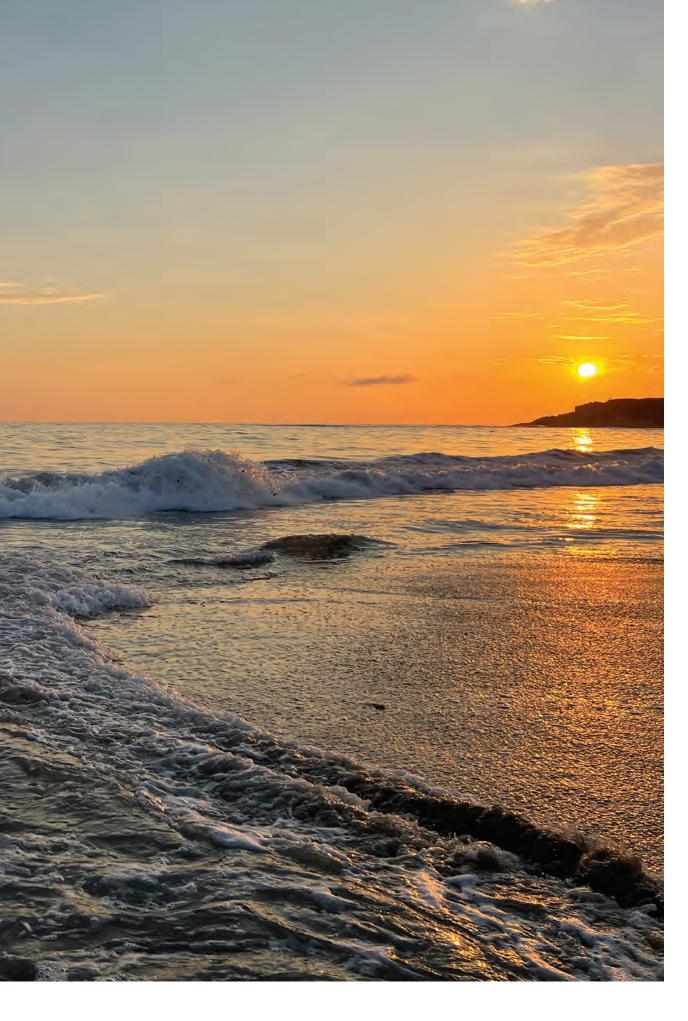
every night when the sun eclipse monsters roam in the moonlight to steal the souls of those awake

secure your eyes slumber through the truth never wonder why the world truly aches

protected encased in a bedtime story's embrace.





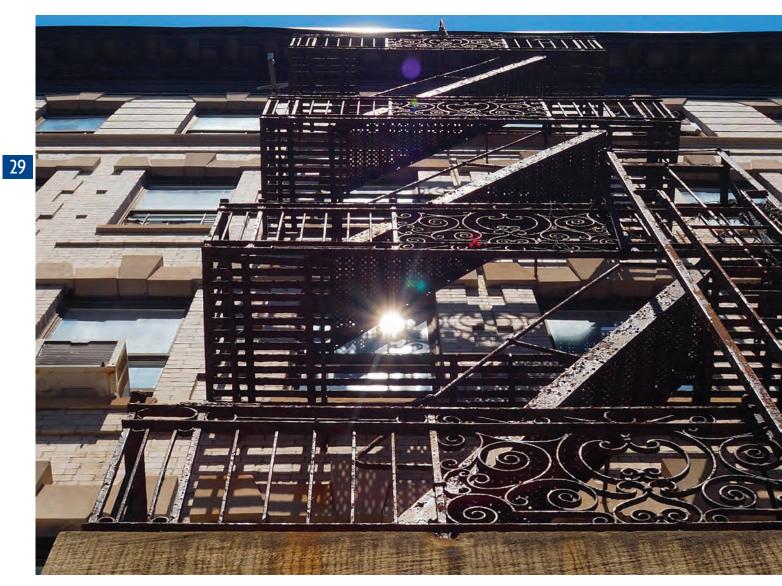


too

I, too, am competent. Although I am young, I know what I want. I know what I know. I know who I am, But you may not see.

I, too, can compete. My knowledge gives me strength. I can give all my effort, I can complete the task, I can win the race, But it will never be enough.

I, too, am able. If I seem immature, I believe in myself, I believe in those around me, I believe in my abilities, Even if you don't.





MAYA HOUGHTON '26

She hadn't taken her eyes off the road in almost three days now. Not even to eat - she reached into a plastic bag on the center console without looking. Not even to sleep - if she slept now, she may as well give herself over to death. Not even to check if her son had died in the passenger seat - he hadn't made a sound in hours, at least.

The car had grown hot, unbearably so. Last week, when they could still afford to stop, when the Third Blaze was hundreds of miles behind rather than a fraction, she had disconnected the car's temperature regulation system to save more gas. Last week, she had stolen a convertible and removed the top to lessen the weight so they could travel faster and farther. Last week, she had looked her son in the eye and promised that they'd reach Oasis.

The road didn't twist. Maybe it had, at one point, but the First Blaze had destroyed the vegetation all over the country. Maybe it did, but she was simply too tired and numb from her hands grasping at the wheels and her foot locked against the gas pedal. Maybe it would again, if those swept off to Oasis before the Second Blaze had enough skill to rebuild this place - unlikely.

She hadn't taken her eyes off the road in exactly three days now. Not when she heard the gently lapping waves, a lie that the Third Blaze brought when it drew near. Not when her son needed help. Not when she had come this far.

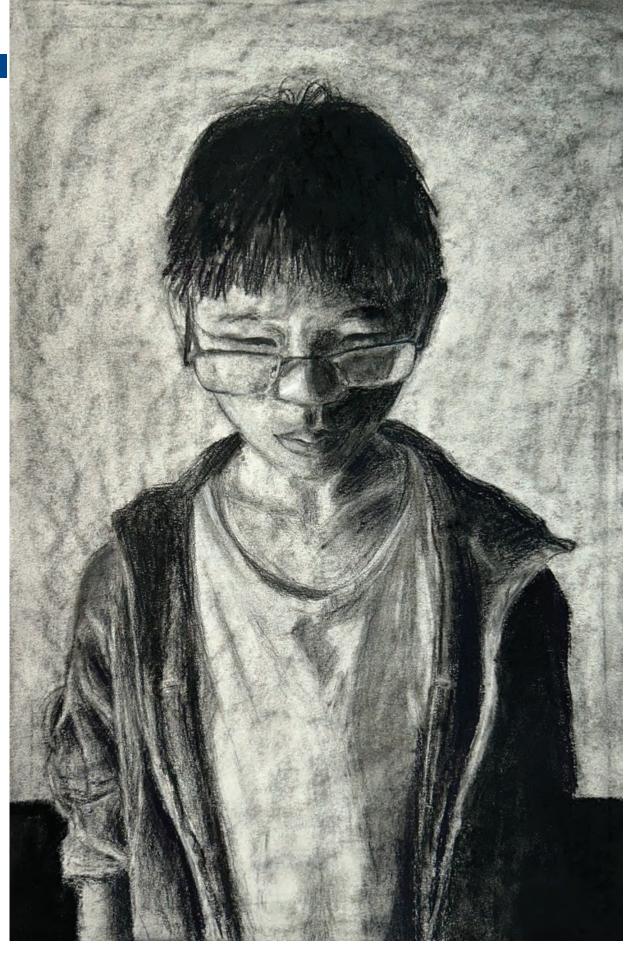
If she could travel back, she would have grabbed her family and ran at the first premonition of danger. If she could travel back, she would memorize her son's every laugh, before he fell ill. If she could travel back, perhaps she could learn how to travel further.

She hadn't taken her eyes off the road in over three days now. It would never end. The gnawing of hunger and weariness and uncertainty would never end. The Third Blaze's soul-crushing heat would never end.

She took her eyes off the road. The car swerved wildly, seemingly with a mind of its own. Her son, startled from fever-induced sleep, let out a short cry that she did not hear. The Third Blaze raced forward, licking at the frame of the car, and claimed it in a desolate, cracked land.

Even though Oasis, with its glowing golden gates, lay before the horizon, exhaustion claimed her; fear claimed her; the Third Blaze claimed her.

Will it take you, too?



31 Gray Portait Sketch by Charlotte Lu '2532 Star Collage by Reyna Verma '27



SOPHIA TULLY '25

Am I an adult now? Eighteen candles, my mom says and my dad has never looked so shocked. rubbing his head, sighing like this day marks the end of my need for them. Little do they know I am caught in a storm in a surging sea, head bobbing under the water and tide pulling me further away from the beach where I can see the house I have lived in forever. Is it too late to ruminate? Must I leave now? I'm suddenly back, and my mom is gingerly touching my shoulder. The candles brighten and my spirit plunges under the waves as I blow them out.





"Par!"

The sound of a clenched fist hitting rhythmically against an open palm echoed down the long corridor of stone walls.

"Par!"

Repeatedly, giggles and snorts filling the air.

"Impar!"

A guard peeked his head into the barren cell to find only the young girl, a playful smile across her oval face. The guard gave a curious nod then left the girl to her own accord, believing her to have gone mad. The girl's mess of black hair fell into her sea green eyes as she turned once more to stare at the seemingly empty wall. From out of the shadows appeared Sebastian, his freckled face radiant within the candle light. He joined the girl on the floor, crossing his legs and folding his pure white wings behind his back.

"Round 16?" Sebastian asked.

"You're on," the girl gleefully noted.

The rhythm of fist against palm echoed once more down the hall.

"Impar!" The girl held out one finger pointed at Sebastian.

"Your round," Sebastian laughed, lowering his outstretched finger. "Again?"

"Par!" Two fingers held out this time. The girls giggled, "Your round."

The game continued for hours on end, the gleeful exclamation of even or odd shepherding them through the night. As all candles extinguished around them, only the single candle of the girl's cell remained lit. The girl looked out her small barred window to find the moon high in the clouds.

"It's almost dawn," the girl whispered. "I can't do it. Not again."

Sebastian looked into the girl's beautiful eyes, like two vast oceans. The glee in them had drained and had become dread. He couldn't wipe the horrid memories from his mind— each time they tried to kill her. First the anchor tied to her waist, then the arrows shot at her small frame, and now a sword at dawn. All because she refused the hand of a man double her age. Sebastian couldn't save her, not a third time. God said it was her time. Gently, Sebastian placed his hand on the girl's shoulder.

"It'll be the last time you will have to suffer under him."

The girl looked desperately at Sebastian, grabbing onto his hand tightly.

"Promise?" The girl asked, her voice choked by fear.

"I promise. I will be with you through every step of the way. But it's getting late. You should get some rest for tomorrow."

The girl lowered her head and quietly nodded in agreement.

"Goodnight."

As Sebastian turned to leave, he felt the girl's eyes remain on him still. He turned to find the girl watching him, tears quietly welling up in her eyes.

"Can you stay with me until morning?" The girl mouthed, her arms shaking.

Sebastian nodded. The girl curled into the shelter of Sebastian's wing as he stretched out his legs. He placed his back on the cold stone wall, brushing the rogue strands of hair out of the girl's eyes. The girl snuggled into the warm white feathers, her cheek rested on Sebastian's arm.

"Will it hurt?" The girl whispered, her eyes half closed.

"Not at all," Sebastian whispered back, rubbing the top of the girl's head.

"Good," the girl yawned. "At least you'll be there. Goodnight Sebastian."

"Goodnight, Philomena."

In the coolness of the night, Sebastian watched the candle of the cell glimmer on the cold walls. The flame flickered, whipping around with the touches of the breeze. Philomena slept soundly in Sebastian's arms. The candle died out. The stillness of night engulfed them.

33 *Marina* by Julia Kubic '25

Sitting under piers on beaches, Where every ripple of a wave nips your feet. Connected with all its living intejectionsLike the rocks that curse the water with concord. Above creaks the wood with heavy shoes. Where have all my impulses gone?

Only yesterday they were kicking sand off of wet feet
Tying their hair away from their face in pigtails.
Leaping through the marron skies,
Finding their way to lean on the ground,
While making streaks in red wood

What remains sitting after every story:

The flashlights they used to make puppets,
Sinking further into the sand while only someone can stabilize.

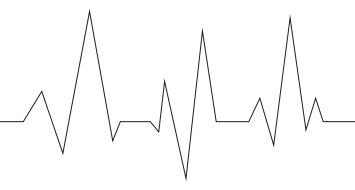
Where have all my impulses gone?

Maybe I am dreaming and I will wake up to dry skin and tumbling hair.

As my pillow holds every waking dream which never came.
I'll put my head very close to listen to the crashing waters on
the wooden stakes building up slipways.
Ignoring what comes in and out
And in and out
I hope they are hiding
Behind marrma grasses and playing with shoves

But we know where they really are. Where all my impulses have gone.

Where Have All My Impulses Gone Lerstenberg 26



The pulse of silent despair...**ENDLESS**

a series of six-word stories ELHAM ABDEL JALIL '25

Step into darkness. Cold air swallows.
The door clicks shut. Silence swells.
I pinch myself. It's still real.
Shadows shift, crawling like starved beasts.

Echoes call me. I stay silent.
Footsteps sound—mine, or something else?
A door sways—half-open, promising escape.
I step forward. It slams shut.

Walls pulse, alive with unseen whispers.

Another handle—cold, slick with nothing.

I pull hard. It pulls back.

The door vanishes. So does hope.

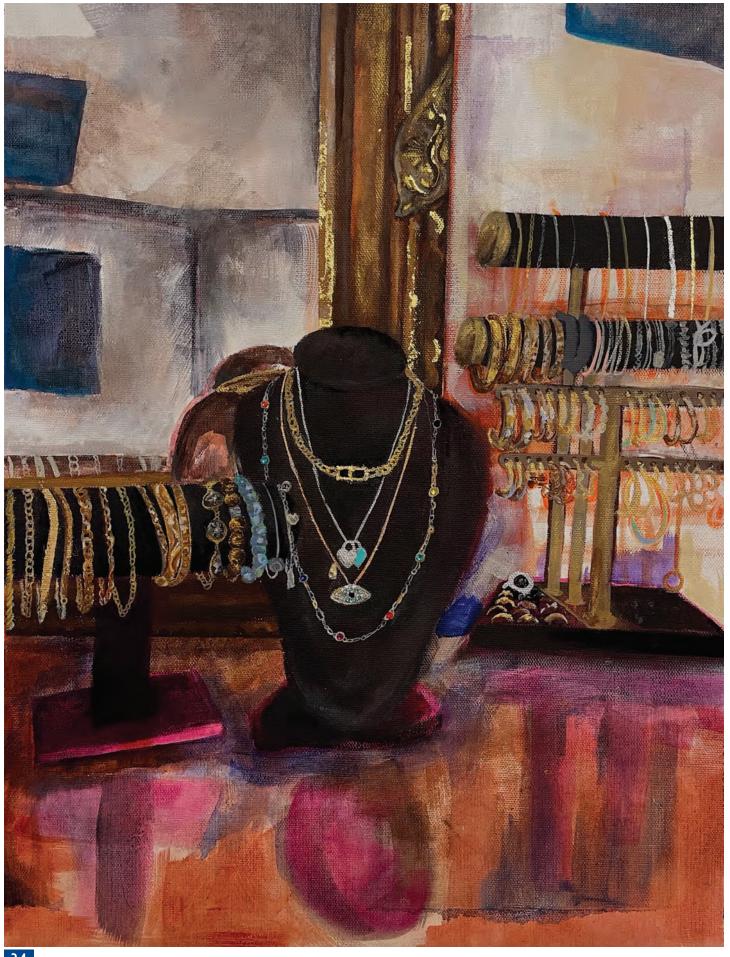
A whisper lingers, curling like smoke.

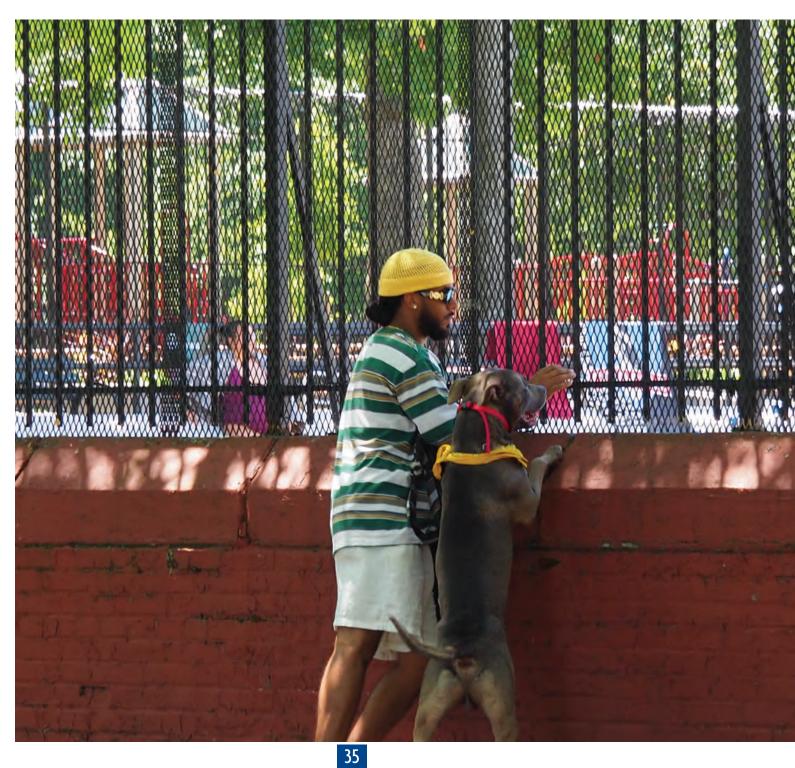
I wait. The room consumes me.

Light flickers—soft, distant, never reaching.

I run. The door retreats faster.

Shadows shudder. The ceiling presses downward. No way forward. No way back.
The air curdles. Time forgets me.
The cycle ends. The cycle begins.







GHOST DOG: a song anonymous

C'mon ghost dog,
I'll take you for a walk.
Whisper like the fog.
I like how you talk.
Tell me things I don't know.
dead leaves that'll stalk
us as we go....
secret caves echo.
our steps, trace our regrets....
weeping willows.
singing streams.
Aching dreams.

lost in the forest. put a body to rest. didn't mean to lose her. but she just blew away.

Maybe things are better. Now.. hope least u can stay.

Ghost dog.
don't blow away.
Ghost Dog
it's just you and me together.
Do I miss her?
Do I miss me?
What ever could we do?
but walk, ghost dog....
ghost dog
we'll float
We'll drift, we'll jog.

Ghost dog, u make me nervous how u tease.
Ghost dog, stay still will u please.
I'm scared that I won't find you.
That ill lose u too.

I'm tired but inspired. eyes are lightly fired

lost in the forest.
put a body to rest.
didn't mean to lose her.
but she just blew away.
ghost dog
hope least that you'll stay.

How long have I been lost here with you?
hollow, but I still see through,
Do you feel me slipping,
Ghost Dog?
Are you fading too?"

Ghost Dog, tell me, was I ever real? Or did I dream you, just to feel?" Don't stray, blow away Wont let reality steal you My friend made outta air don't you go and scare me pull a "never really there"

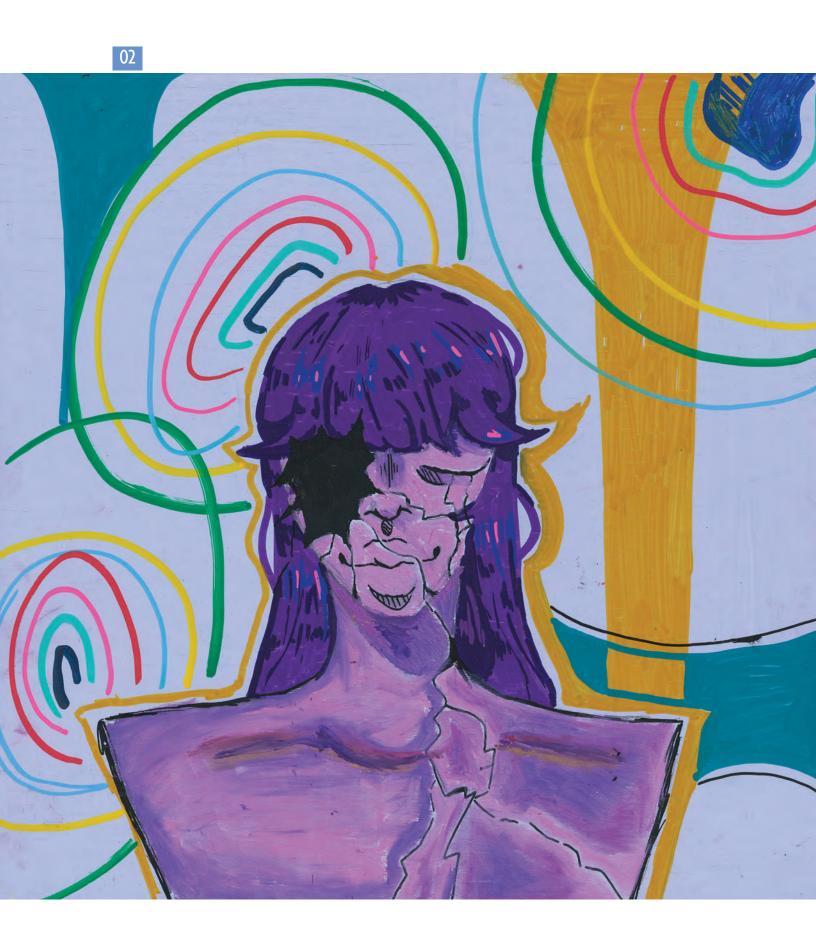
cuz i love you so...

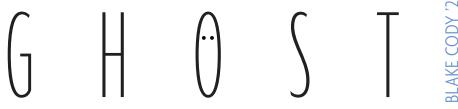
ghost dog.... ghost dog lets walk Em stay close.





SECTION 2: The Ebb Tide





1. I Watch

They say this house is haunted. I know it is dark at night, the floors creak, the long hallways are eerie. They sneak in through a splintered window and creep down the halls, silent and wary. Searching the shadows for an answer.

I am the haunted one, caged in by the sharp walls and pointed windows. I can see the line that pulls me back, a weightless chain dipped in blood. Dripping like a faucet that never fully closed.

When the full moon came, she returned. Like a memory, or maybe searching for her own. She kicked down the door. Moonlight beaming through the doorway washed the blood clear until it was tears, sparkling. Of course she stumbled, taunting me, tripping in the dark shadows of the crumpled rug.

But I saw. I always did.

I melt into the corners now, slipping into the deep red sky of the wallpaper. Even easier now than I did in life. I watch.

She edged forward, losing the urgency she had entered with, as if an icy wall blocked her. Reaching out a hand, she touched a finger to the chain I thought only I could see. The tears kept dripping. Her touch trembled, a scarlet cast returning to the chain, and she turned away.

2. Reflection

I don't think she will ever return. There is a chill in these walls that will never dissipate. Maybe if someone just tipped a candle to the dried out rug, the blaze would offer some release. I can see the vibrant red flames crawling down the once delicate, pristine rug. It slowly climbs four walls, its ashen smoke obscuring what relics are left in this place. Gifts from long ago, rotted like the wood frame they rest on.

These days the chain anchoring me to this place feels heavier. A noose tightening around the neck of the condemned. But it drags like a child's favorite cherished toy. Loved to the point of destruction. Now the golden flames are reaching higher, snaking up the stair banister, and my blood-soaked tether is trailing ash across the worn hardwood.

Ghosts aren't meant to be trapped here, in this liminal corridor between the living and dead, but some get caught in its spider web. That phantom chain appears for some reason or another. That one mistake, that one loss, that one inescapable fault blocks the way. It freezes you in place, in time, a memory that sticks like a stubborn pebble in your shoe, a tune you can't quite place.

So I pace these gloomy halls, waiting for the searing red to hit my wrists, but for now the ice lingers.

FOUND Joens

A SOLITARY BREATH

I come of age skyward,
alongside the twilight stargazer
disregarding all but their ceremony in
honeyed moonlight
It's an imperfect lifetime;
not all can be relished,
but all is curious as a relic
the night is swathed in regal blue and
your lips are of pleasure
and the scent of love
until I am whipped back into solitude
twin to the breath of the air.

FLAMES

I lick the flames from your ceramic back, smooth as the gold of life your arms are the shards of a willow, burned into my memory, but ever-fading.

I wake in a tender bed of ashes and hope my bones don't fade to earthy embers.

ABSTRACTED PERSPECTIVE

An anniversary made of plastic lightning sends vibrations, powder and cinders everywhere the angels, too, veiled behind metal. The nectar of abstraction permeates the marriage between the old and the real I'm burned by the pink of perspective keeled over past my hips life is round and ever-moving.

more

six arms, one heart a quiet dancer in the wind, delicate as a whispered breath, fragile in its fleeting fall.

than

alone, a speck that vanishes, forgotten before it lands. together, a force veiling the earth in silent might.



from afar, mere pale simplicity, but up close, a masterpiece etched in frost, woven in winter's delicate script.

ignored until it stills the world



a breath held a hush of white a child's delight in silver light, a moment weightless waiting

ELHAM

until laughter molds it angels pressed into powder,

flat, even

ABDEL

messages traced by mittened lovers, footsteps carving paths untold.

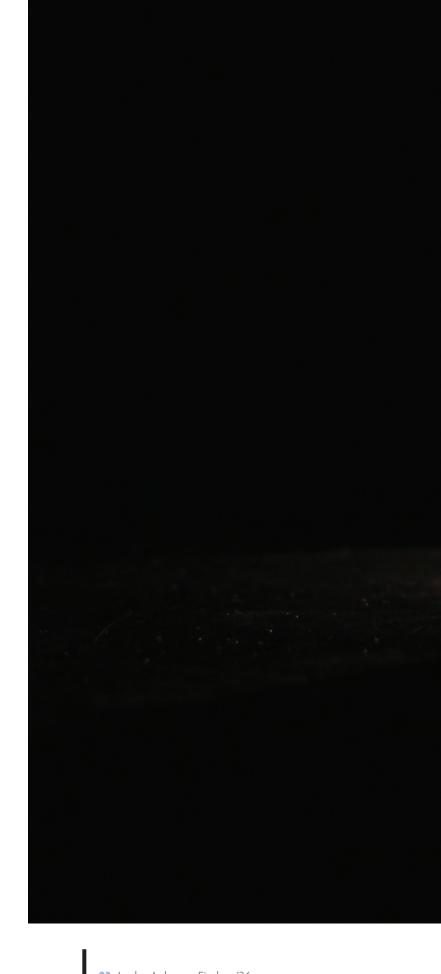
JALIL

'25

drifting, fleeting, meant to disappear, softening into morning's quiet glow,

until someone stops and sees

vanishing, unnoticed—







a found poem based on Emily Dickinson's "'Hope' is the thing with feathers Little Bird did perch on hi

ELHAM ABDEL JALIL '25

A Little Bird did perch on high— Unabashed—in the Gale— It cast its Tune across the sky And let the echoes sail.

It sang of Land, it sang of Sea As fierce as any Storm— The Strangest sound it seemed to be— Yet warm and free, its form.

The Sweetest Words, so soft, so bright They filled my trembling Soul— They reached my Extremities—light— And made my spirit Whole.

But then it Stops—its voice grown Sore— Its Feathers shake with fright. It falls before me—Sings no more— And fades into the Night.

I hold it close, its breath so weak— Its Wings no longer wide. Yet still—it gazes—frail to speak With Hope—it cannot hide—

Then with its final Tune—it cries— And Beckons me—to Sing— To keep its Song so it may rise Upon another Wing—

Its Feathers still—its Soul takes flight— A hush upon the Air. The Chillest moment—dark as Night— Yet Hope lay latent there.



we're not so DIFFERENT

VIVIAN QI'26

People in love all around the world are not so different We stare and wish for another's touch All of us longing for the same thing in the same time Beautiful places filled forever with the spirits of those that were

04 Geese by Claire Hudson '25

05 From What a Torment by Jasmine Neumann '25

The Girl In the Flower Shop

There's a girl staring at me from inside the flower shop.

My hand reaches for my cheek, perhaps something has left a mark. I haven't been near any marring substances recently, however. The gilded knife is hidden in my favorite book I mutilated to hide it; I've learned how to put out fires in that curious way, wetting my fingers and pinching the flame; the pot of henna gifted to me from a relative in India sits unopened next to the already written letter of gratitude praising the quality and depth of the ink.

My hand is certainly more polite than my mind, etiquette written into the grooves that ink (and no henna) usually stains. It waves.

The ghastly girl does not wave back. Her tangled hair and raccoon eyes unnerve me, but if the grooves of my hand insist on politeness, so be it.

I try for a smile, practiced and demure. The girl returns it, mocking and cruel, a normal set of teeth yellowed and split off into needles.

There is a quiet beauty to ghosts. At first glance, I would have believed her to conform to that as well. Pale skin, dark hair, dark eyes, a monochromatic wisp. Yet when she smiles I see that there exist truly ugly ghosts as well.

It is distressing to think that one's smile makes the world a little more unpleasant, to think that your happiness is antithetical to that of those surrounding you. I know how the children I grew up with would treat her. I know that they would taunt her, lock her in closets, hold her down as they attempt to make her smile more coherent with a knife. I know that they would be justified in doing so. It makes more sense for such ugly things to be the result of human enmity than the balanced and detached Mother Nature. A Glasgow Smile, they called it.

Though her smile disgusts me, I protect this ghost by hoping that she had never been human. In case such a request is too much to fulfill, I hope that she had been locked away. That she had grown up with only the figments of her imagination to play with, that she wouldn't release the blight of her joy on the world nor would she have any reason to be afraid to do so. I hope that whoever kept her had broken all the mirrors, had only served her cloudy water, had used nothing but porcelain plates. I hope that she had never had any reason to butcher apart her favorite book to hide a knife, to look off a bridge and want to float along the river with shattered bones, to wrestle with faces in the dark for weeks with the promise of two full prescription bottles and a beautiful, blinding light.

I recognize her face. Suddenly I realize her eyes have grown without the rest of her, full of the quiet weariness of life. She has experienced everything I ever have and ever will, at half my height. Still, she has nothing to teach me. I have no desire to learn from her. I have no desire to learn anything.

I remember when I would close my eyes and see imprints of whatever source of light I saw, like golden confetti at birthday parties on the inside of my eyelids. They leak at empty seats but aren't birthdays really beautiful? A square on the calendar with the old vibrating reminder that I am here. That I take up space. Oxygen. Life. I close my eyes and I see little scribbles in the edges. A scared artist's chicken scratch.

When you see a face in your periphery in the dark, there is an instinctive turning of the head. I cannot turn my pupils any further. I still try, feeling the pull in my forehead like a taut string.

I quite like the look of little rivers of red in my eye. Visible red bronchi help me breathe.

She can hear my thoughts, I am sure of it. I retract all of my previous protection over her when she begins to laugh and I look at her once more, her eyes sad and her mouth opening and emitting a horrific screeching sound, her skin and sinewy muscle stretching and snapping like stitches.

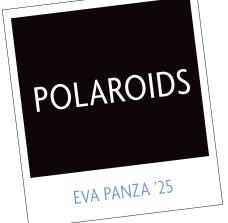
Recoiling. No, no, she cannot infect me. I turn and walk hastily, all the while looking through the window as she wades through anemones and dahlias, floats over buttercups.

I cough when I finally reach the brick wall, my hand balancing me on the wall as I expel from my lungs all the pestilence that she had transmitted to me, strangers leaving a wide berth around me. Thorn after thorn after thorn as the blood from my lungs mixes with that running down my arms. The wretched girl has sickened me.

06 *Glassblowing* by Aron Nathan '26**07** *Untitled* by Juliet Parsons '26







Life is made of polaroids.

Snapshots of highs

and lows,

triumphs

and failures,

good days

and bad.

Moments are captured in an instant.
Each image dimly lit, eyes glowing, smiles piercing white.
A snapshot saved.

Polaroids are stored, kept in cardboard boxes, or dusty albums, to one day gaze upon once more, and remember.

Yet polaroids fade.
The border becomes fuzzy
with age.
The light becomes dimmer.
The faces blur
until only shadows remain.

Tell me how to remember.

Please.

How do I cope
with only a few memories?
You couldn't remember me.
Do you remember now?

Is it good that polaroids fade?
That bad photos will dim
with the good ones?
So that snapshots
will be held only by a few?
Maybe, just maybe.

Life is made of polaroids

HALF-REN EMBERED

A half-remembered dream is like Suddenly losing your footing down a ladder, Falling— A straight line drawn across a never-ending page.

What you do know feels slightly out of reach, Like a blurry memory fading into daylight. Like flying above a cloud That dissolves into the distance As we move forward in time.

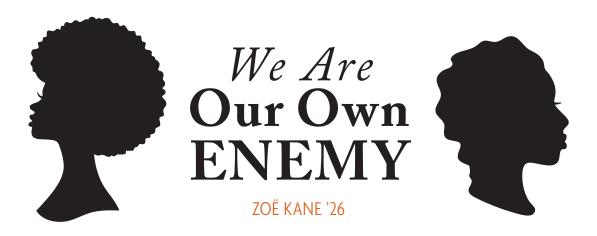
The memorable feels definitive, plain, While the unspoken has a rhythm, a reason— Though we don't quite see it yet. Or do we?

What I mean is, Perhaps we do know the meaning of such things: A silhouette yearning for more.

But then— We're awoken in a hurry, The pieces slipped away like sand through our fingers. And soon, We forget.







Within the black community, there's a tendency to blame our oppressors for many of the problems we face. If I listed the plethora of issues within our community resulting from the racism institutionalized - this essay would be never ending. Instead, I want to talk about how the black community furthers narratives established to divide us and how we need to recognize and confront them.

What do you think about when you hear the phrase 'black community'? Some think about the culture, food, religion, music, or dance. Like rap music from artists like 2Pac to Kendrick Lamar or how much the black church differs from other traditional places of worship. Although those are all aspects of the black community, there are also other aspects that are just as prevalent, yet aren't given much recognition. For example how the black community plays a heavy role in instituting colorism or putting one another into boxes like 'ghetto' or 'whitewashed'. Even topics like textureism discrimination of those with coilier hair textures or features - the discrimination of people whose features stray from the social beauty standard need recognition too because they divide us and hold us back.

Blackness is an array of beauty. It's not subject to one look or standard because there is a diaspora of ways black people appear. We differ in hair textures, from kinky to coily or type 3B to 4C; there is not one texture that dominates. Our hair is a product of our ancestors and relatives so why do we as a community demonize those of have coiler textures. It's a common practice especially amongst the south or the internet to hear that finer textures are 'good hair' or that coiler textures are 'nappy' and unkempt. We are taught that perms or relaxers are needed to make our hair more appealing or beautiful. Why is that? We do this because white people have established this precedent that finer hair is more appealing but that doesn't mean we aren't free from blame as well. Why does the black community continue to push this rhetoric when we are aware of why it was created in the first place; to divide us. We also further other institutions set to harm us like colorism or featurism. We further the notion that black people with darker skin are ugly, mean or unappealing with the intention of hurting those who have darker complections. Personally I have family members who've endured colorism all of their lives that is primarily derived from black people rather than white people. There are even terms that we see circularting the media that further colorism that are used and or created by black people. This doesn't uplift us at all, this only continues what our oppressors had started. By continuing these self depreciative notions and harms against each other - we only divide ourselves, we start to be enemies instead of allies. We start to see each other as competition rather than uplifting one another. This isn't right and this isn't what black beauty should entail but unfortunately these preconceived notions are what we are left to define black beauty as.

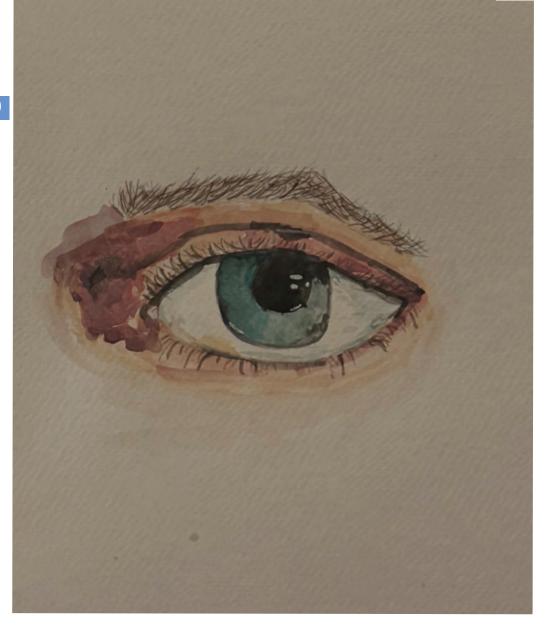
What constitutes blackness? A simple question but with so many perspectives. Perspectives that provide insight but also divide and demonize. Ever since I can remember I have been called 'whitewashed' a term that insinuates that I refrain from embracing my blackness; my identity. I have been told that I talk white because of how I enunciate my words or I have been stereotyped to only listen to Taylor Swift or One Direction. What makes it more interesting is that I wasn't put into this box by my white counterparts, but my black counterparts. Ideas like these permeate the community far too often and they initiate an unsaid divide between blacks who step outside the stereotype of "blackness" and those who "embrace" it. On the other hand, within our community there is this stigma to evade parts of our culture in order to refrain from being labeled as "ghetto". That could include hairstyles, dialect, attire, interests and much more. There's been times when I have been around other black people and they have criticized others for acting "too black" as if it is just a costume to put on and take off when you want. What both sides fail to realise is that blackness is not defined by surface level things like hobbies or the music you listen to or just the melanin in your body, the tones in your skin, and the texture of your hair. In my eyes, Blackness is defined by cultural awareness - to be aware of the historic and habitual dynamics of black culture. To embrace the privilege of having access to the arts and traditions that our ancestors had created. It also requires the utmost respect and understanding of the historic context of blackness, not only in relation to racism but also in the aspects of individuality and expression.

As a community we need to be in to uplift ourselves and our differences rather than demonize them. By the black community continuing to incentivize these harmful narratives - it encourages those outside of the community to follow along. The reason the phrase "Black is beautiful" isn't just subjected to only one idea of black, it's to every single aspect of blackness. It shouldn't be put in a box to fit into someone's own personal idea of Blackness, it should be broad because it incorporates almost 40 million people who identify as black. We cannot keep letting the stigmas and stereotypes to live on through our community because as we normalize the toxicity of these ideas, we become our own enemy.

09 *Girl and Sister* by Jalia Pittman '27







PAYING

MY

CAPRI GERTEIS '27

I baited the hook with a golden coin

anticipating a swarm of fish and fins used to worms and grime

plenty swam by, doubtful blind eyes.

I catapulted the coin against the current hoping the sea would accept my fee

engulfed within the murky blue decided just one coin wouldn't do

and left a dollar to be carried through.

Forgotten Words Sylvia SWAI 27

"Nakupenda sana" left the lips of my father. Softly, like the words might shatter if spoken too loudly. I didn't know what he meant. What he said was not important. He knew English, I didn't speak Swahili. So I never asked him, and he never told me. For years, the words hung like air between us, unanswered.

One night, years after I could hear the words leave my father's lips, I grew curious, aimlessly scrolling through the messages we sent each other through WhatsApp. It was here where I found the words again. I typed them into Google Translate.

"I love you."

A dense pit grew like fire from the bottom of my stomach. Frantically, I scrolled and scrolled through our messages, counting the times he told me "nakupenda" and I did not answer!

It took me 10 *nakupendas* to realize that my father knew I could not understand him.

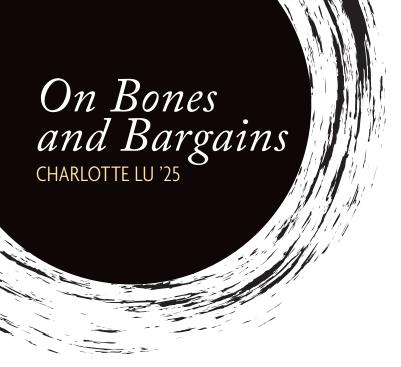
The words were heavier in Swahili, rooted in a place I'd forgotten.

He would not say them in English.

For "I love you" is a lie if "nakupenda" is the truth.







An old baby tooth lies in a carved wooden bowl.

You check and recheck the salt circles around it, making sure you didn't accidentally make a spiral instead of the interlocking concentric mess the book describes. Pausing once to smooth a mark over, you look upon your ritual site—hastily crafted from any salt and candles you could find in the cupboard—and deem it ready.

You'd thought long and hard over which god to summon. You briefly considered the Hearthwarmer, known far and wide for their miracles of healing, but you'd thrown the idea right out. You'd been praying to them and making offerings for months as your wife slowly got sicker and sicker, after all. If she still isn't better after all that, then what good would trying to summon them do?

The Wind O'er the Waters wouldn't help. Neither would the Keeper of Chaff. The Thresholds' Guard might, but he's always been a bit too cryptic for your taste.

That left...

"The One in Marrow," you begin. You'd had to look the name up in one of the archive's dusty tomes because most simply knew the god as *the bone-dweller*. "May this prayer reach you. May you find these words worthy."

You pause and ready your knife. "I beseech you to... to come here and help me. Please."

A clean cut to your finger, a drop of blood, and you wait.

A second passes. Two. Ten.

And then the tooth in the bowl starts moving.

It vibrates, skitters, newly-animated through your blood and a god's will. Misty tendrils of light, like branching nerves, coalesce outward and form a shape somewhat akin to a person, the tooth where its tiny heart should be. It sits in the bowl and you can feel it staring up at you.

Speak, then, and be heard. What do you seek?

Its voice is lilting and gentle and altogether too much like a child's, you think.

You bow your head. "I seek a miracle."

A miracle, it repeats, slowly as if to taste the word. That sort of thing is not so easily granted. A miracle of what?

"One of health," you answer, clasping your hands to keep them from shaking. By all the gods in the world, you *cannot* screw this up. "One of restoration. The one I love is dying, you see, and I've—I've already tried *everything*—" Your voice breaks. You pick it back up again and continue. "I offer you my soul, just... please make her better."

But the... what is it? A deity's equivalent of a sock puppet? The thing through which the One in Marrow speaks is already shaking its head. **You cannot do that.**

You look at it in disbelief and in rising frustration. "Why not?"

Its... eyes, you suppose, find their way back to you, its clear gaze searching for something you don't have. **Your soul is not yours to offer.**

"Why not?" you repeat.

You're glaring at it. You should probably stop doing that. You close your eyes and breathe in and out and focus.

It tilts its head. You do not already know? It belongs to... hm. I suppose you would call her the Wind O'er the Waters.

What? What? "You're lying," you say, the words slipping out before the lone shred of common sense in your mind can bring up the fact that you are accusing a deity who can probably turn your organs inside out faster than you can blink.

Why would I? I would have given your offer much thought—if not accepted it outright—if your soul were still in your possession. As it is, though... It spreads its hands. I can do naught but watch.

"But that's *impossible*," you say, gesturing as loudly as you can without breaking the salt circle. "I don't—I've never given my soul to any other god."

The small, barely-humanoid wisp of ether in the bowl doesn't have eyebrows, but you get the overwhelming sense that it would be raising one if it did. Really? Does your oath of "holy matrimony" not mean anything anymore? Whatever happened to that?

"What?"

You sit down on the floor. You don't trust yourself to be able to still stand and not mess up the circle after that. "I—I got married to—"

Right. You need not worry about that, though. She really does love you.

"I'm not worried about *that* part!" you snap. It's a lie. You're worried about most everything right now. "Why is she *sick*, then? Gods don't do that. Is she cursed or what?"

It shakes its head. Not cursed. But you live in a place without oceans. What little water there is here is stagnant in ponds and puddles. It seems to me that she might be... is there a word for it...? Homesick.

"She got me all worried and worked up over *that*?" You're going to strangle her. Not that it would do anything, but still. It's the thought that counts.

Call me old-fashioned, but I believe that a trip to the seaside might do you both some good.







Purple bruises

SYLVIA SWAI '27

I live in a world that is beautiful. A place where the sky is blue and the grass is green. Where things run, and jump, and fly— A place where water literally falls from the sky.

I roam the day that is bright and filled with sun, where the night is dark, covered in moon and stardust. My people are miraculous. We speak with our mouth, two eyes, and each hand;

The birth of this world is a miracle.

For our hearts beat, and our legs, they stand.

I live in a world where black boys chase street lights instead of the Sun.

And with 16 candles, they're gifted a gun.

Full of those who don't know of a world where the days are dark, and the grass is white, where the sky burns yellow, and the moon leaves at night.

5.4 million dead in the DRC

Rwanda has a refugee crisis

Half a million people in Mali have been displaced—

I live in a place where "you should care", but only when the people dying look like you.

A world where 33 outnumbers 10 million,

where one rich man's death equates to that of a thousand poor children.

I live in a world where the scratches of white children seem to be worth more than a black child's scars. For there is *more* of the night, yet we see only the stars.

This world is beautiful, broken, battered and bruised— But funny, isn't it? Purple bruises don't show up on black skin.

- 15 Drilling and Driving by Celia Bentrott '2516 Rocky Outcropping by Kate Hilbert '25

Excluded Song from



L FIRSTENBERG '26

I've been told it's beautiful in Eagle River Perfect for the summer But it gives me a shiver I arrive every year optimistic I've been told it was perfect Something must have shifted So we passed by the small town And the ice cream candy store In search of summer camp But what I found was something more

Chorus:

a page torn from the campfire's song book it reads:

Endless roads in the north woods in Wisconsin Endless holes of the place I've been found Singing Joni Mitchell, and Adele's Shallow Roots on the ground tracing back to Chicago And even further back to Ohio And even further back to my mom's life, oh

I've heard Dam Lake has leeches Normal for a lake But its not great for the shore I arrived every year optimistic I've heard it's perfect Something must have shifted So the girls were mean and that's not what I wanted I Don't get what I want Out of something so haunted

repeat chorus

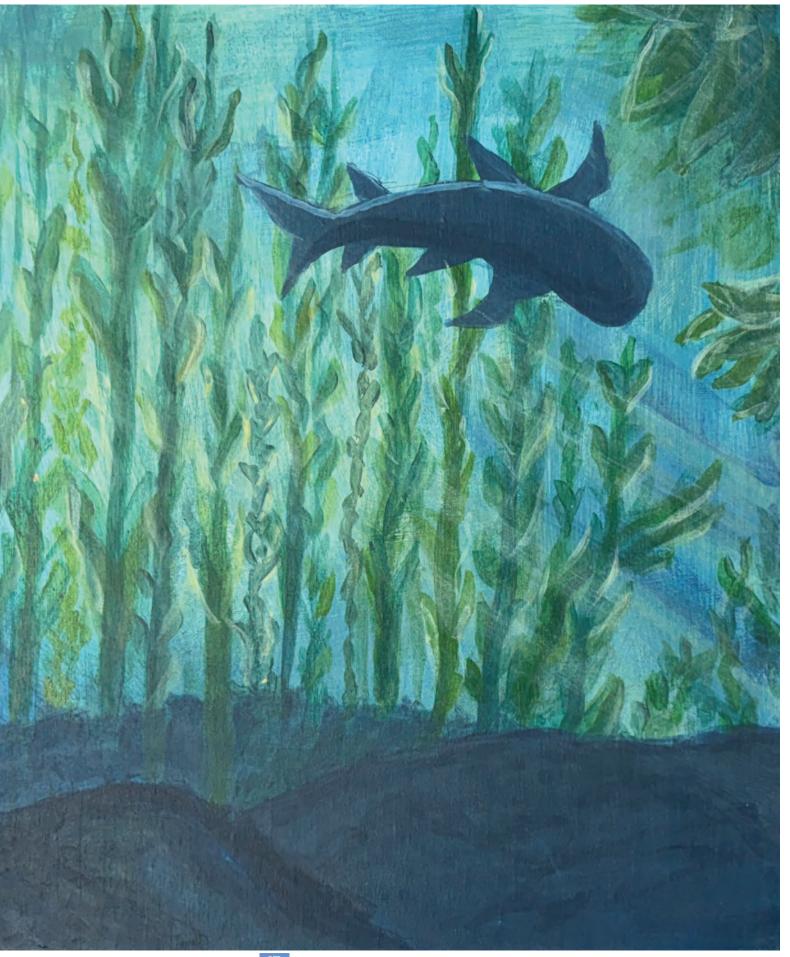
It was sour enough (rest) for her She loves lemons To me they are repulsive We arrived every year optimistic I've heard it's perfect Something must have shifted I don't blame her for her summer She was never as mean as the cabin I was bunked with

Such bitter feelings and such warm fires Stars don't shine like they do when i'm not with others Running through a realm i'm not entitled to My casket carries campfires And my arm holds the creed

repeat chorus



17 Shark Under Sea by Lizzie Lyman '26



I found it on the damp soil beneath the flowering tree. It was sprawled outside the living room windowsill as if defenestrated. Sometimes the beautiful things get confused, staring through the crystal panes. I'm sure its wings felt strong as ever in those last moments. New and hopeful, nostalgic for a time that never arrived. Those golden wings, adjacent to the glow of the sun. Haunted by a dream laid behind that sparkling glass, tangled in threads of bright glowing sky.

I carefully buried that gorgeous bird, unceremoniously placing a drab rock among the tree's roots to mark its grave. Maybe it deserved a more flamboyant ceremony, but not everything needs to be celebrated like a birthday. Most days aren't special.

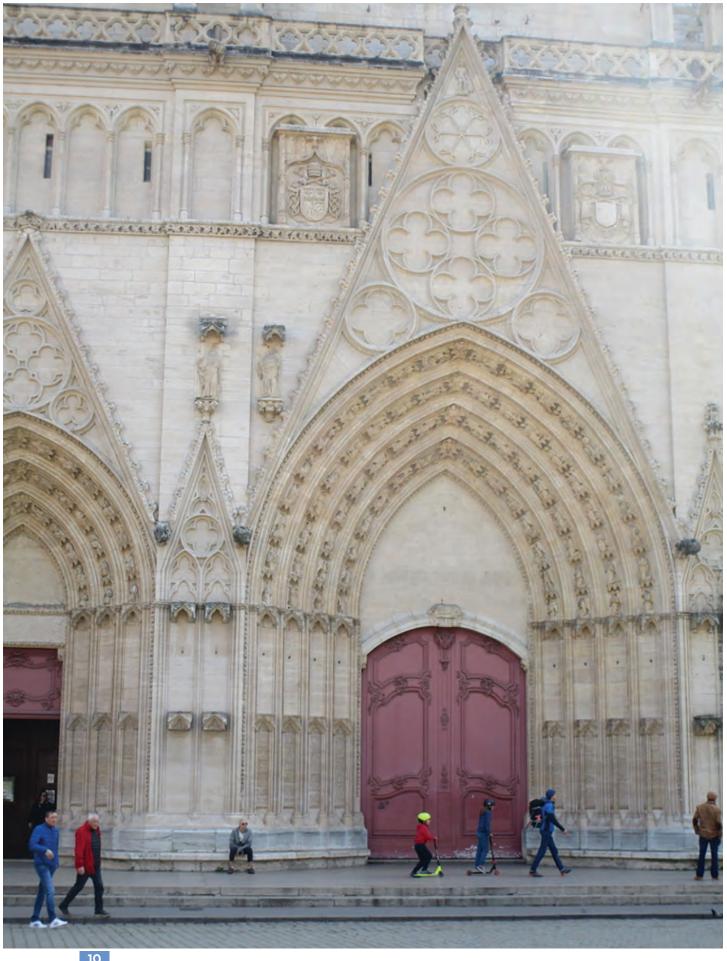
There's nothing magical about a bird hurtling into the living room window. It's not an omen or a curse. But now I bask in the striking serenity of this ordinary tragedy. Birds don't die in a dramatic burst of flame, or sit weeping by the hearth. They don't melt like a candle, slowly smothering themselves in their own waxen flesh.

They don't ask for a eulogy, or for a lyric sung for them. The whole affair is a flash of gold reflected from glass to shiny feathers and back again. Nothing more than a dot of an i in the penultimate word of the third chapter in a library that is the universe.

So while that day was tinged with melancholy, it faded like the spots of fiery blood in the dirt. Perhaps tomorrow the glow of the dawn will catch another pane, scintillating like a polished diamond, or a sparkling new toy, a promise, a reminder of what could have been. You never know when a scurrying mouse will cause the eagle to plunge, just missing, and sink into the swampy earth of its new home.



Beach Birds by Hannah Kaufman '25 Cathedral by Kate Hilbert '25 <u>o</u>





WARNING SIGNS of a Storm

ARON NATHAN '26

—part 1—

The clouds gather Dark and gray, seeping over the horizon The wind howls Loud and insistent, piercing through my brain The grass rustles Swish, twitch, swish The thunder booms Ominous and deep, rumbling the very earth The lightning strikes Fast and sharp, burning a path through the sky The stars twinkle Unaware and happy, dotted through the sky The moon falls Lifeless and bored, stuck on a path The trees rustle Shaking and shaken, holding onto their roots The mice quiver Skittering and scared, hiding in the walls The cats hiss Taloned and terrified, hidden under the blankets The dogs bark Angry and alone, fighting an unseen enemy And the clouds gather

—part 2—

The people sit on this normal night As the clouds gather Dark and gray, seeping over the horizon Ominous and full, rumbling through the world The clouds gather

20 Path by Sadie Mickles '27 21 A by Anushka Kothapalli '28





8:14

I stare at the empty apartment. I notice the chipped paint all over the white wall in my room once covered with my vibrant artwork. Scars of their presence left behind.

19:37

I hug my little brother as he looks up at me with wide eyes. The moving truck is finally full and the tall, tan man with heavy boots pulls the back of the truck shut. The metal rattles and I watch it drive away filled with years of memories.

20:13

A navy blue minivan drives up to the front of the apartment building. A middle-aged man with gelled-back brown hair, jeans, and flip-flops steps out. He reaches over to lift my bright red suitcase with my Hello Kitty luggage tag. I step in front of him letting him know that I will do it myself. He chuckles and moves on to loading the rest of the luggage. I use all the strength I have to lift my bag to the trunk. The sun has just set and the humidity is unrelenting.

20:16

I come back to the van after grabbing my booster seat which my mom never lets me go without. When I come back, my mom is scrolling on her phone trying to use her translation app to communicate with the driver. She waves me over asking me where I was. I open my mouth and explain to the driver that my parents don't speak Hebrew and if he has anything to tell them he will go through me. I also tell him a secret that my parents can't understand. I tell him that I am scared.

Everyone knew not to be out tonight, especially driving. Missiles flew over my neighborhood every day that week, but I was always inside. I was used to running to the bomb shelter to wait it out and getting right back to business. But that night was different. When you are out on the highway there are no bomb shelters. I remind myself that I know the protocol. We practiced during preschool. You pull over to the side of the road immediately, get out of the car, and roll up into a ball. But, I had never had to do it.

20:21

I ask the driver to promise me he will pull over. He giggles. I tell him it is not funny as I hug my Curious George blanket tight. I make him say the words to me, "I will pull over and follow the protocol." It's not enough I think. I make him give me a pinky promise. He puts out a stool for me to take the high step into the van. I walk to the back, sit in my car seat, and itch a thick and juicy mosquito bite on my leg. As I reach for the buckle, I hear the sound.

20:22

The piercing siren. It wails. I jump out of the van and run as fast as I can into the apartment and straight into the bomb shelter. When I open the door to the shelter, I see neighbors in towels and pajamas. The first-floor grandmother sits beside me and places her hand on my back. She masks the worry that peeks behind her wrinkles as she moves her hand in circular motions. Her warm smile attempts to cover her anxious eyes.

We thought we had already said our goodbyes, yet we are met with one last moment. One last moment to play patty cake with my favorite neighbor Morahn. One last moment of worry, terror, and fear for my life.

20:37

We are given the all-clear. I hear Morahn's soft slippers glide across the concrete as her mother lifts the latch and pulls the steel door open. As I walk through, I think about my friends and neighbors who will be faced with many more of these moments. Morahn will have more late nights on the couch watching news reports of recent bombings. She will continue to beg her mom to email her friends to make sure they are okay. I will not.

20:45

We say our goodbyes one final time and load ourselves back into the van. As the car starts, I squeeze my blanket tight trying to hide my fear. My leg taps and I am shaking. I ask the driver once more if he remembers our promise. I ask him how long the drive is. 43 minutes, he responds. I pull out my sparkly Elsa watch and stare at the curvy green digits for the entire drive.

21:02

My eyes are locked on my watch, the numbers surrounded by snowflakes. I try to bring myself to the imaginary land of Frozen, but it doesn't work. All I see are the numbers. My dad rests his hand on my leg to stop it from shaking. I do not look out the window to say goodbye to my home.

21:28

We finally arrive at the airport. I thank the driver for keeping us safe. We are one step closer to leaving the country.

21:54

After we make it through security, my brother and I beg my mom to buy us watermelon gum, our favorite airport treat. As the cashier loads the bright green and pink packaging into a white plastic bag, I hear it.

22:00

The piercing wailing siren. It's happening again. I don't know what to do. This has never happened at the airport before. We begin to run. I don't know where we are going. Feet shuffle, plastic wheels roll across the tile floor, voices yell, babies cry, and we all run toward the shelter. I hold my mom's hand as tight as possible and she pushes us up to the front.

22:01

We shove ourselves into the bomb shelter. It is white, cold, sterile. Voices project off of the walls. Bodies are squeezed together and you can feel the sweat in the air. This really is the last time, I think. I look to my right and see a little boy that looks about 3. He is the exact same age as my little brother. I am so happy he can leave too. Across the shelter, I see the young cashier from whom we bought the gum. She stands in the corner, fidgeting with her necklace. This is not her last time.

22:21

We finally make it to the gate and onto the plane. As I sit on the soft, blue, leather seats, I am grateful that I made it to this moment. I think to myself that it is all over. The pilot's voice echoes over the intercom. He explains that the take-off will not be typical. As a plane rises in the air, it is vulnerable to a collision with a missile. He announces that he is conducting a fast-speed take-off to approach the safe height as quickly as possible. He urges everyone to drink water so that our ears will adjust and to prepare for the intensity to come. "At 35,000 feet, the risk will be over, he declares.

"Prepare for takeoff," the flight attendant announces with a thick Israeli accent. "Thirty-five thousand," I say out loud. I repeat this number to myself again and again. The plane launches into the sky and the bags in the overhead bins all slide backwards with a loud swoosh. I squeeze my mom's hand and close my eyes.

22:32

We are at 10,000 feet the flight attendant announces 17,000, 20,0000, 30,000.

I am shaking as gravity presses my head and tiny body back. I feel like I am stuck to my seat. I whisper the number again and again.

22:34

"35,000," the flight attendant announces with a shaky voice. The passengers on the plane begin to clap. I begin to cry. I made it. I am safe. My little brother is safe. My big brother is safe. My Mom and Dad are safe. I have not felt like this since the war started two years ago. My mom asks me why I am crying. Everything is okay.

I should be happy. But I think of Morahn and the first-floor grandmother. I think of Ikhlas, my preschool teacher, the cashier at the airport, our kind driver, the bagel man who delivered us bagels every Sunday. They are not safe. They will never reach 35,000 feet.

7:32 am

It is my first day of school in America. I should be happy. I am safe. I do not need to worry. I fill up my brand-new water bottle and carry my heavy backpack filled with school supplies galore. I hop into the car ready for a new start.

9:14 am

As we are sitting on the itchy rainbow carpet, an ambulance drives past my first-grade classroom. My heart drops. I run outside, across the hallway, when I realize: it is just an ambulance. My school counselor meets with me and tells me that I am okay. I am safe. I do not need to worry.

But I worry. I worry that I am in first grade and do not know the English alphabet. I am in the lowest reading group. I worry that I will not make friends. I worry that people think I talk weirdly, with my Israeli accent. I still say "paint face" and "cloth wash", Hebrew ordering of words jumbling my speech. The streets are wider here. My house is bigger. I do not get any more mosquito bites. The people look different. Nobody smokes in California. I have a brand-new bike. I should be happy. But I think of Morahn. I wonder if she went back to school today. I wonder if she slept through the night without the blaring sirens. I should be happy, I say out loud to myself.





When You're Older

You know what grown ups say

When we watched them with large eyes, playing their card games as the grown ups dine solemn faces staring laughter ringing through their glasses of wine

You know what grown ups say

When you asked them with curious naivety, all of those questions that loomed above, occupied those questions that couldn't be answered those questions that kept making you ask why?

You know what grown ups say

When we never understood why leaves change color why grandma was dying why humans couldn't fly why mommy kept crying

You know what grown ups always say

You'll understand one day, when you're older.

When you're older

But now I'm older yesterday I feel like we were still just kids And it's as if I'm watching others grow up becoming those grown ups but I still haven't grown up.

When you're older

Do you want to be older? Be like them sitting at their higher table, talking about things we will learn about, eventually I still feel like I'm on the grass of the greener side, watching them all fade into grayness, the realness of adulthood.

When you're older

When, when, when But I'm not older, am I still growing and rising but never reaching Can't take away the when, the dangling potential because I am not older, I'm still waiting for when I will finally understand

As the grown ups said it (or did they?), the day has come as planned (or has it?) Trust them, they have all the answers to all those wonderings we couldn't explain, they said You will understand it all

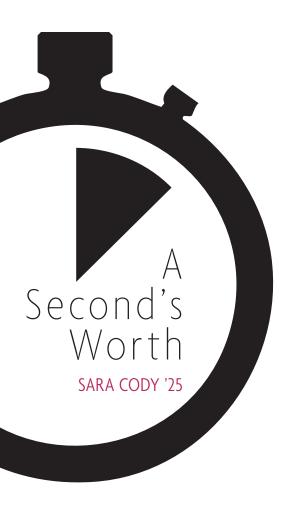
When You're Older.



ALLY HUDSON '25

Comfort never flourishes in strict bounds.

23 Square View by Suzanna Sleeth '25



It's all so abstract

The petals of a yellow flower in bloom Just in season, opening up to kiss the air

The most beautiful scent of fresh life And new love Filling the air with bright colors

I could fill pages with soft touches but They really only matter When they are absent

If I could brush away all that hurts I would in a second If I could swap the fading flowers out For brighter ones and Place the ones that need A little bit more love right Beside my light so That they may heal and grow, Blossom into the world like the sun each morning I would in a second

My own skin I would in a second But I cannot

So I will walk you through the fields of

flowers

lust in bloom

Just past the trees to the sweet open air And wait for your heartbeat to slow I'll sit here for as long as you need Even if for more than a second

I'd paint my thoughts the hue of your eyes If it would dull your deep blue ache I would let my mind wander ever so slightly Over to the hands you lay on my shoulders And the eyes that wander so deliberately The hair that falls gently down your back as You lean your tired head on my shoulder I can see you clearly but still We are never close enough so If I could just Take away All Of

If I could seal the wounds with

JASMINE NEUMANN '25

The In between

I would in a second.

When I go to sleep tonight I hope to dream of the dead. Time wasn't right it was quaking and wrong, distorted by the musings of some long dead scholar. I want to dream of angels Fiery rings of eyes and all frequencies whining at me to wake up

24 Fall Foliage by Abby Muresan '2525 Liberty by Maggie Reef '25



25

New York

EVA PANZA '25 (6:03 a.m.)

I wake in the city that never sleeps, the lights across the street from my hotel still blaring white in the office building, buses drive up and down the one-way street below me, a man walks past them in all black, eyes forward, the building (under construction since 2017) gleams a yellow hue diagonal from my room,

I think of the tree decorated only in scaffolding standing to Christmas attention at 30 Rock in November. the largest cathedral in the country (built in 1879) glowing grey against the colorful billboards down the road, the oldest toy store in the country cleaned up now from the hustle and bustle of tired parents and mesmerized children,

I look over at my mom, sleeping soundly in bed, her feet protruding from under the covers, pillows stacked around her (a fortress). The sound of the new day growls outside, the buildings encapsulated by the light of the coming dawn. New horns blare, cars drone on, down the street of coming morning. Never fully sleeping.



L FIRSTENBERG '26

WARNIN

Don't look too far in front of you Estimated millions. Shoes, shoes, shoes Do you see the smoke ahead? Blowing left and right again

Keep me entertained, Millions of songs, Hats, hats, hats Cue the patriotic music. Thinking in black and white again

Don't look too far in front of you, Consume from miles. Stars, stars, stars Buy them while they stare at us, Being yes and no and grey again

Keep me entertained, Stroll past me, Trains, trains, trains Go because we cannot leave. Choosin' who lives and dies again

Don't look too far in front of you Answers we would never choose Bread, bread, bread Poke holes in my story Chewing on my words again

Keep me entertained, Like I cannot read books. Wine, wine, wine Stumble when I should be running Drinking all the color again

Don't Look too Far in Front of You:

26 Makeup by Ayden Magence '25

right?

shape

ugly wound. You have fixed me.

Yes, this jagged,

disfigured, beautiful

was necessary to cover up a jagged, disfigured,





Once a year. The splash of oil. The squish of a spoon. The flip of a spatula. "Hey Mom, do you think this one is done yet?" Seeping onto the paper towel, oil, oil, oil. Once a year. The smell of grated potatoes permeating the air near my sink. Their juices squeezed out by that one dish towel, always the same one. The scent of frying wafting all the way upstairs, all the way downstairs. "Hey Mom, do you think I need any more oil?" So many recipes all combined into one crispy golden pancake. So much trial and error, why is one half cooked and the other half raw? Passed on and on, the tradition of making latkes. Eeking out the last little pancake each and every time. Sneaking bites as I stand there, fear of being burned nothing compared to the scent and taste of those latkes. "Hey Mom, do you want to split another one?" Grated potato and spices and egg and flour and oil. "Hey Mom, can you finish grating this potato so I don't grate my fingers off?" I don't know the recipe, but maybe one day I will. "Hey Mom, whose recipe is this?" All I know is that we need apple sauce and sour cream to dip them in. "Hey Mom, did you get the apple sauce?" All I know is that we never make enough. All I know is that I always want more. "Hey Mom, can we please have latkes?" All I know is that those latkes, that once a year treat, those latkes, are delicious. They may not be easy to make, they may not be healthy to eat, yet still, we make them, we love them, we eat them, we crave them, more, more, more. A family tradition, once a year, rarely more. Once a year. Oil splashes. Potato cooks. Spoons squish. Spatulas flip. And we eat.



Leather JACKET

Each day I wake up and don a too large coat. Vintage and leather, it smells of the past, of the lives it lived before I picked it up at my local Salvation Army. I had been looking and looking for a leather jacket for months. Each time I drove down the tan road and turned into the beat up parking lot I had hopes of finding the perfect leather jacket. I would search and search until, finally, I found the most perfect coat. I grabbed it from the rack and tried it on. Maybe it was a little bit big, but I didn't care. So, now I don this coat each morning. The scents of years long passed have seeped into the worn leather and permeate the air around my jacket.

The first time I wore it, my allergies flared up. Yet still, I don it each morning. Despite the itchy eyes and stuffed nose and suppressed sneezes; I walk through the world wearing this coat. I spent far too long looking for it at my local thrift store, I hoped for it for far too much time, so I must continue to wear it.

It swallows me, tries to fall off my back, makes it difficult for me to move. It fights my every twist and turn and change. Yet still, I don it each morning. How was I supposed to know that it would be too wrong for me, that day in the thrift store?

Besides, I might still grow into this jacket. There has to be a reason I thought it was so perfect. Then again, I haven't grown in years. Too short and too small, devoured by my jacket.

Yet still, each morning, I don this coat and move through the world. I show off all that my jacket has to offer. I think *I must look so cool, swallowed by my too large jacket*. I laugh and dance and live, all the while weighed down by the leather burden I carry.

Each day I pretend it fits out of desperation. I ignore how wrong it feels. The itching, the creeping unease. I ignore it all in favor of pretending that my vintage leather jacket is there to protect me. Thus, I hide behind it, all the while coughing and sneezing, eyes red with intolerance. It is all wrong for me. Too big, too much. Yet still, I act as though all is right. I pretend that it fits. Desperation seizes me and I hope, despite everything, I hope that one day I will grow into my vintage leather jacket.

I never should have bought it at that Salvation Army.

Because, I must don it each morning. I have no choice. Be it a shield or a wall, I must don it each morning to survive this cruel, cold world.



Terror invades my dreams some nights

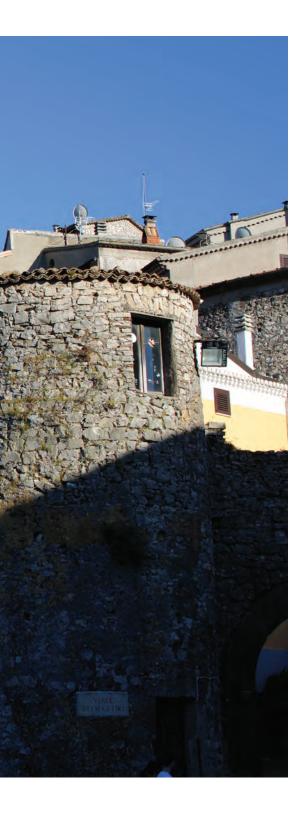
Images reaching a terrible inertia
Just before my eyelashes brush my cheeks
In a flutter of blinks
Never to open again
But always imagining daylight
Midnight tries to dampen the soft glow of a
Blinking firefly
But she shines through
Brighter
Sprinkling drops of liquid light
That drip down past the filter of rocks and stone
Cloaked over the darkness
Like water, the droplets burst when they land
And radiate, bright in the air

She'll reach the sky before my words
Ever reach my lips
Fueled by a phantom glow from within
And just as she bursts away into the sunlight,
I'll take one step toward the wrought iron door
Built high to keep terror out
And embers from seeping through

She's stainless on the surface Like a chandelier, Hanging divine and impenetrable Scintillating in her years

Once saved for only the most beautiful guests, She's now a constant shine in the center of the room Though all the world has grown brighter, And her light in the day appears dull and splintered She stays Crystal and unchanging





28 Village by Percy Milligan '2629 Birch Trees by Gauri Saxena '27







2 OTE AANCHAL NASSAR '27

To some, it might have seemed like a lonely summer. Days drifted by slowly, marked by a routine of work, meals, showers, and in bed by 10:30. Yes, that was a big part of my summer, but it was also the first summer in years where I felt less burdened by anxiety. Amidst starting a new journey, dealing with the loss of family members, and constant changes, I found solace in one person.

She was the reason I looked forward to Tuesdays and Wednesdays at Thurgood. In her blue jean shorts and off-the-shoulder top, with her bikini strap peeking through, she greeted me with warmth and affection. Each day we spent together was filled with laughter—sharing funny TikToks, ordering DoorDash early, running to the convenience store with our Crocs falling off, screaming while it poured down, raining outside, and making fun of young kids swimming. We found joy in each other's company.

She was always wanting me to stay longer when I had been at her house since noon. In her backyard, having the hot sun casting down on our backs as we chased her little siblings, we felt at peace. At peace with freshman year's ending. At peace with the uncertainty of the future. We simply wanted to be around each other.

"Quality over quantity", is a phrase often used to emphasize the importance of surrounding oneself with the right people. To me, she embodied this in every way that summer. She listened to me, understood my anxiety, and was genuinely excited to be around me—something I had been searching for a long time.

It felt comforting to be lonely with her, I held onto her body, embracing her, because at the end of the day, that's what falling in love feels like. The feeling I got when I first saw her after my two week long vacation; only surviving on long distance facetime calls and I miss you. The feeling of what it means to be emotionally intertwined with someone. Though it might have been a summer spent mostly in her company, in my eyes

It was the summer I was in love.

I explore old photographs
I search for traces of the first flame

Teenagers
that house filled with what once was,
now ghosts.
my grandmother's old scarves
the roots of the trees under which I bloomed, too

The patio one red mid-afternoon grew to almost half its size but my legs stayed the same dangling from the porch swing, just long enough to scrape the wood carved through with veins

and I fooled myself into believing my hands were there to narrate the world as if the stars were attached with strings.

I sing, that's for sure there's so much I want to hear that I can't so much light slipping through the ever-widening spaces between my fingers so many notes suspended in the air hovering until someone comes to gingerly pull them down

dust particles lit by the light from the window

I must shake them off and begin a new layer of skin

and I lie
if I say my words are made of glass, roses,
birds taking flight, the river catching the wind from my breath.
My brother's eyes,
embers catching fire
the words, though,
ask to be counted.
but each one begins to sing just as it falls again

There's so much that I want to say and that I cannot but I sing, that's for sure
Our end, from the other side
is just beginning

- **30** Glasses and Jewels by Charlotte Lu '25
- 31 Underwater by Suzanna Sleeth '25







Standing in the Rain

SHRIVIDYA REGADAMILLI '26

My soggy, wet pleated skirt drips beads of water onto what were clean, crisp white shoes-

now stained with mud and silt atop the sole. I feel the rhythmic thud of the raindrops on my shoulders, speeding up and slowing down-

inconsistently, like my fluctuating heart rate with every thought that passes my mind. The curled ends of my hair slowly straighten out into long, sharp pines-

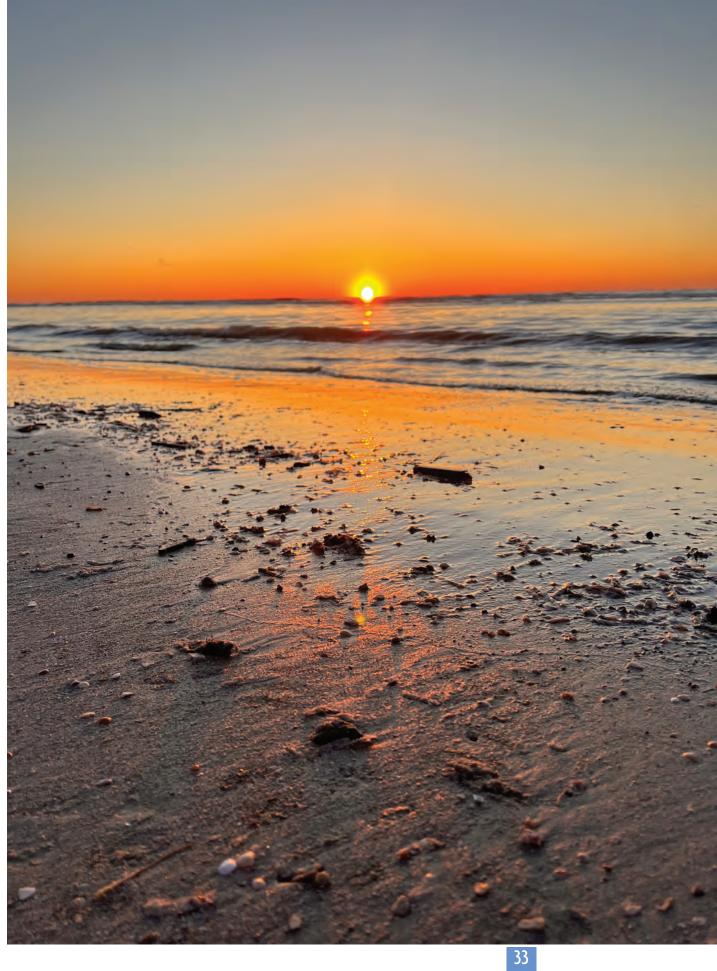
a façade uncovered. The occasional car speeds by, the driver eager to return home to a warm, welcoming home-

incognizant of the lone benches, lamplights, and souls at the side of the road. Dark, enveloping clouds dissolve into the distance with every passing second; I long for the obscure yet serene sky that embraces unconditionally, with an unending-

yet definitive-

presence. My cold, shivering knees give in and I collapse into the chipped metal bench beneath me.

I've stood – have been stood up – for long enough.



01 Il San Pietro by Maggie Reef '25

SECTION 3: The Spring Tide





Skull ripping Killer Shark But forced to be a Gummy Flexible and Yummy Swimming in my lonesome Under the fear of being eaten But oh who cares About The silly little Gummy shark Though I'm Blue on the outside White on the bottom Why do I feel blue Inside and out? Why can't i be The shark I seek? When have you ever seen a shark Scared of a tooth and A 13-year-old sleuth Ripping me apart And finding my lost soul

Born to be a feisty

02 Perched Butterfly by Grace Pietrick '2503 Flowers by Grace Pietrick '25

On the inside

Where a shark should be







As To

Icarus grasped the sun as he fell squeezing the light in his fist and closing his eyes

The Sun looked down as he fell and shed a tear for the boy who had loved him enough to risk his life



The Sea looked up as he fell anticipating the splash and the wings in the water the sudden end of loneliness

Dadaleus shut his eyes as he fell for he couldn't bear to watch his world fall apart

I scanned the words: "as he fell" Ovid knew tragedy but he failed to see the beauty in it

04 *Imagination* by Maggie Reef '25







HER NAME WAS ummer

AANCHAL NASSAR '27

Her hips sway to the rhythm of the Caribbean

One that reminds you of that hot summer night When it was just you

A ship

In the middle of an ocean

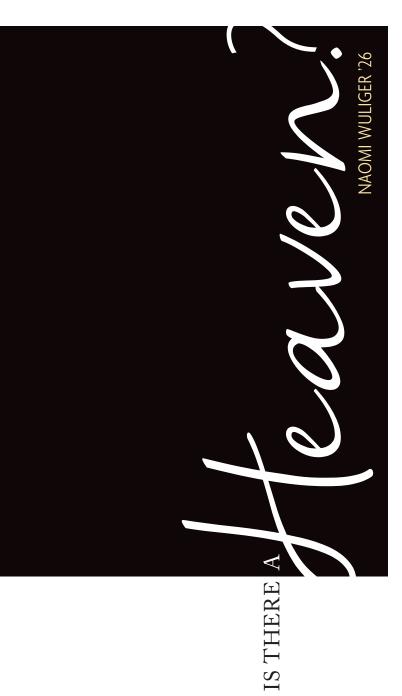
She follows Sunny Hair on Instagram With warming and creative styles for Tight coils of a mocha brown shade Styled weekly her perfect wash-n-go

Flattering ocean blues Banana day yellows And the happiest of bubble-gum pinks Hug her melanin skin As it glows with a sun-kissed sheen A testament to long days spent soaking up the sun's warm beam

For a few short months she brings warmth to their souls

A fleeting respite from the cold winter's roles Those days are etched in memory never to fade For who could forget the joy she brings to each summer shade?

- **05** Flower by Grace Pietrick '25
- **06** Good Dog by Lizzie Lyman '26
- **07** Jewelry by Mallory MacRaild '26



The time read 9:52, hours past my bedtime. I slowly opened my creaky door with tears streaking my face as I wobbled to the upstairs hallway. Peering through the railing, I called for my parents with fear in my eyes, and so they joined me upstairs in my bedroom. I agitatedly explained my worries regarding death since as a small child, dying seemed extremely intimidating. As I buried my face into my tear-stained pillow, my parents attempted to reassure me: "No, you're not dying tomorrow... you will live a long life." However, the reassurance has not always been enough as I continue to pray nightly that I will wake up the next morning with my family and loved ones safe, and I will not be separated from them in an unknown abyss. Unfortunately, no amount of praying or empty reassurance could give me the answer of whether I would go to Heaven when I died or if my soul would be lost in darkness. Although 4-year-old me does not think the same things 15-year-old me thinks about, I have spent sleepless nights through the years pondering various philosophical questions. However, the question I have thought about the most entails a human's afterlife. I have been raised to believe in God and reassured that I would ascend to Heaven when the time is right and exist in an indescribably perfect world. However, a part of me also wonders how I can know if any of this is true. After a certain point, I decided that a question mark about my fate was not going to be enough. I needed proof.

Humans have a tendency to be passionate about the ideas that give them hope and comfort. Psychiatrist John Bowlby and psychologist Mary Ainsworth have both identified that we are born with a "powerful need" for attachment. Through our brain chemistry, we have evolved and retained neural networks completely dedicated to attachment, originating from our attachment to our protectors- our mothers (Thomson and Aukofer). Additionally, humans are able to cultivate complex interactions with others in our heads, suggesting that it is not unlikely that humans have created the entire concept of religion simply by creating gods or making up the Heavens. Knowing that science tends to be more on the atheist side, I do often wonder how we can really be so sure that someone did not just make up my religion. I also consider, as Bowlby and Ainsworth said, that someone could have simply created gods and the Heavens out of a need for attachment, followed by many others choosing that path or belief without question due to their desire for comfort. Indeed, it is natural to want comfort in life, and that's what I was struggling with that night as I cried to my parents, terrified that perhaps someone did make Judaism up, and when my life terminated I would simply be in darkness, without my soul existing.

The idea of wanting so badly to feel a divine existence was heavily supported by Canadian psychologist Michael Persinger, who developed a "God helmet," a device that blocks sight and sound but stimulates the brain's temporal lobe. Persinger reported that many participants claim to have been in the presence of "another." He continues by suggesting the conceivability of St. Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus being the result of a seizure, making him think he was doing something he was not (Thomson and Aukofer). If this theory is accurate, Persinger could also successfully debunk the entire concept of near-death experiences (NDEs), making the argument that as we are struggling to stay alive, it is easy to cultivate a world beyond one's wildest dreams and call it a religion.

However, I wonder if the claim that we are just imagining every single aspect of religion is just an easy way out- as NDE's are providing a new pathway into proving God and Heaven are real parts of our world. Approximately 8 million Americans claim to have had an NDE, and many of these survivors claim that this is evidence of an afterlife, according to a Gallup poll. Author of Life After Life, Raymond Moody described to CNN in 2013 the experiences of many NDE survivors. "A lot of people talk about encountering a being of light," he said. "Christians call it Christ. Jewish people say it's an angel. I've gone to different continents, and you can hear the same thing in China, India and Japan about meeting a being of complete love and compassion" (Miller). This suggests that Bowlby and Ainsworth might be right- humans seek an attachment with some higher power to receive comfort and love, but they seem to be incorrect about this being just a false idea everyone has made up... assuming you believe the NDE stories.

In contrast, Andrew Newberg, a neuroscientist and professor at Thomas Jefferson University and Hospital, has spent time studying the brains of deeply religious people (nuns and monks) to determine what is really happening when these people claim to have ecstatic experiences as they meditate. He finds that the "light" and "tunnel" NDE people see can easily be explained with science. He points out that as your eyesight fades, you lose peripheral vision first, and explains: "that's why you'd have a tunnel sensation." Additionally, seeing a bright light could be a result of the visual system shutting down last (Miller).

Years later, I spoke to my dad again: "I've been raised and taught that I need evidence to prove something... I don't understand how we can just blindly believe that Heaven exists." After years of asking this same question, my dad finally explained: "I have evidence I can get from

Grandpa, but it's not evidence you can see... and you may not fully believe it, but I can give you a book." Dr. Eben Alexander's Proof of Heaven offers an extremely convincing perspective of Heaven, as he survived a near-death experience- and now he is convinced of an afterlife. Although this may not seem unusual for someone who underwent an NDE, Alexander is a neurosurgeon, and even believed for a long time that the claims of meeting God and speaking to dead relatives were "pure fantasy." He also believed that these experiences were brain-based, until he had his NDE and his brain was not working at all. "I was encountering the reality of a world of consciousness that existed completely free of the limitations of my physical brain," Alexander explains. "My experience showed me that the death of the body and the brain are not the end of consciousness, that human experience continues beyond the grave." This kind of circumstance in which the person experiencing the NDE actually used to believe that other survivors were simply fantasizing is extremely eye-opening to me, as it seems to actually debunk a lot of the science against NDEs. For example, neuroscientist Andrew Newberg claims that the "light" and "tunnels" seen by people who have NDEs can easily be explained with a fading vision. However, Alexander disproves this theory as his entire NDE happened while he was unconscious and senseless. There seems to be no scientific explanation for what happened to Alexander other than an unexplainable out of body experience during his coma.

As tears stained my mom's hands as she held my tired face, I slowly drifted off into sleep. However, the same thoughts would continue to surface even as I grew older. And so, I continue to look to NDEs as a source of comfort and a reason to maintain faith in Heaven. I often think about the science that can quickly disprove out of body experiences, which makes me worried that life is potentially finite, ending with an ominous abyss that leaves my soul lost in the universe. However, the stories reported by NDE survivors are simply awe-inspiring, and truly gives me hope that there is an afterlife out there, especially Dr. Eben Alexander's experience in a Heaven-like environment. I fear that I will not be able to know what comes after life until I die, but the fascinating stories told by people like Alexander will help me keep the faith in whatever comes next.

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Hate is a disease and it's spreading Running rampant in terror Infecting the soil so that flowers wilt and collapse Obsessive addiction Cutting the sun into thousands of pieces Fissioning atoms Sharp chopping of the air A tearing of hope into chunks A story of destruction and contamination A disease that silences so the falcon can dust off its prey Infectious rage hidden behind a mask A species trapped

But hate can be healed A story can begin and end and begin and end again Not with one prescription But with a viciously determined treatment Sewing stitches into bleeding scars Hope is a scab to be formed on an open wound Corruption can only be treated once diagnosed

We children stand alone Glinting in smoky air Filled with the bitter ashes of our ancestors I can't breathe Children of the world, unite To breathe in the smoke of brutality and prejudice before breathing it out as one We have nothing to lose but the death of the earth



- 9 Animal by Cami Shelfer '2610 Study by Marina Luttge '28









The Sky is Not Blue ANANYA RAO'27

When I think about it the sky is not blue and neither is water roses are not red trees are not green A brunette's hair is not brown and sunflowers are not yellow. No.

Instead.

the sky is pink, red, and orange at sunrise a light blue that complements the clouds around it

and a dark blue when it hits that time in the evening, you know you should

go to bed

and the water is not just blue

but green in some places a dark blue in others and in the best places it has no color it is completely and utterly clear.

Clear in a way you can see your toes in the sand, no matter how deep into the ocean vou are

in the way where it gives you a hug you didn't know you needed

roses are not red sometimes they are white

and when they are red, they are a crimson that no one can entirely decipher

trees are not green

because they are orange, red, and brown

in the fall

and emerald in the spring

the type of tree you see

will always be a different color

a color as complex as the unknown

a brunette's hair is not brown

because in a certain light, it is caramel

then mocha

with a hint of copper

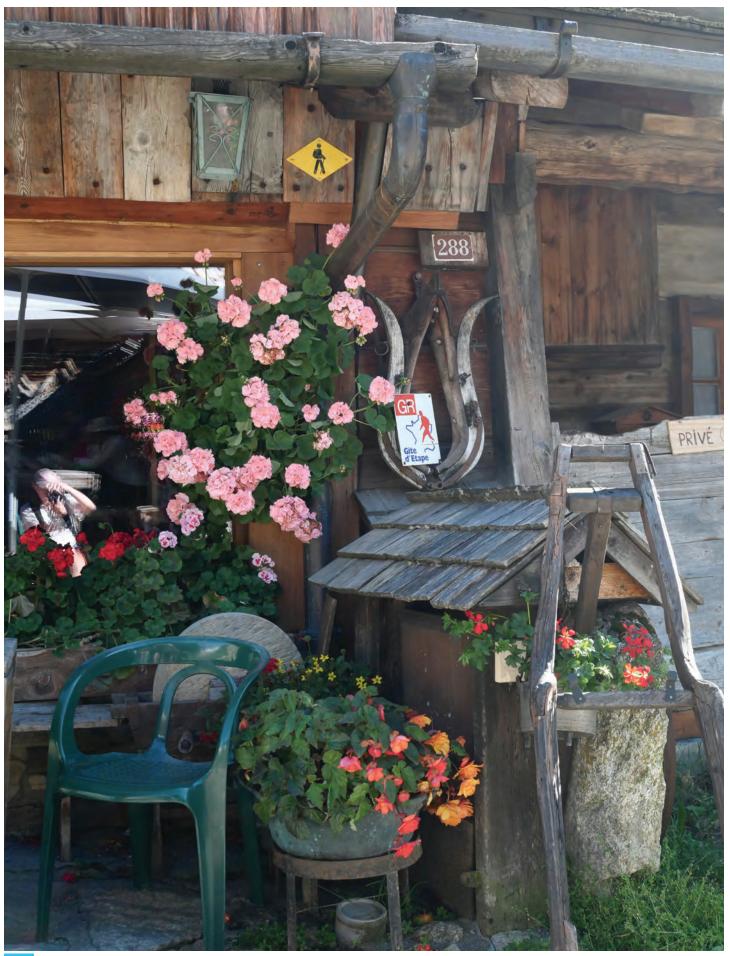
but yes

Sunflowers are yellow and when you look at

them long enough

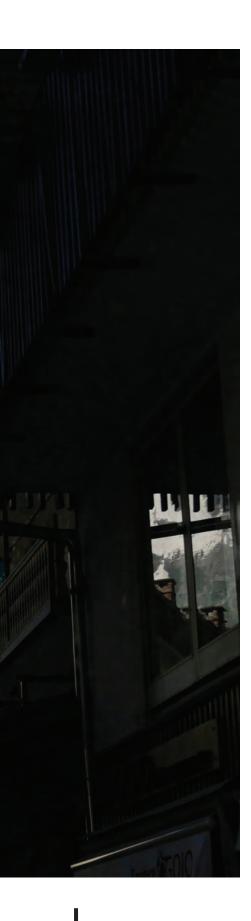
in a field of them

they are the epitome of happiness









Sydon Smysyd) CELIA BENTROTT 75

I've always loved reading; English classes have always been my passion. I've taken both AP English classes (Lang and Lit, as we always called them), and I genuinely enjoy reading the complicated novels introduced in the courses, despite my classmate's grumblings about how boring or useless they appeared to be. I love finding the hidden meanings behind the author's choices and digging deeper into the literary and rhetorical devices found within the text. I've sharpened my abilities to develop what may seem obvious or surface-level into a complex collection of ideas.

As someone on the design side of the Performing Arts, much of my job as a technician and designer is focused on figuring out how to further the story the performers tell through what is physically displayed on the stage: sets, costumes, props, lights. With my English classes teaching me how to pick out the hidden messages left buried in the nuances of the text, I've started to bring these ideas of rhetoric into theatre. I ask myself how color and seemingly superficial design elements can further the story being told, and what messages I can hide within my work. I explore color as both a compliment and a contraster, light as something that can brighten, but also be used to hide, and how a set can be so many things at once, rather than a static location with simply a little creativity and a few tweaks.

I used to find literary analysis stupid, in a way. I questioned whether the author was consciously leaving this trail of hidden-meaning breadcrumbs, or if my teachers were simply urging me to create a meaning when there wasn't one actually there. However, as I've matured and learned, I think both approaches to thinking about writing and literature are equally valid. It's possible that an author did purposely consider the message a certain comma may lead, but it's equivalently viable that they were more concerned about telling their story than the grammar they left behind. Creating a meaning that might not be consciously left is an approach based on individualized thought and purpose. If I see something hidden in a text, that's simply my interpretation, and someone else might not agree, simply because their perspective is incredibly different from mine.

When thinking about these ideas from a design perspective, the story of those who create a show is evident in the methodology they use to tell it. One person's interpretation of a work puts a new and creative twist on something that may seem static or stuck. If I morph a play by Shakespeare simply through design, I'm not negating his story, I'm evolving it for myself and my audience. I'm creating something that is still fundamentally the same, but my spin on it tells my story and my interpretation. I want that to be my legacy in the world: masking my story in the backdrop, just like the authors I grew up studying. Hidden meaning doesn't have to be intentional, it's really just all about interpretation.



Threads of the Land ELHAM ABDEL JALIL '25

In a small village nestled between hills and olive groves, a family lived, their lives woven into the land like the threads of intricate embroidery passed down by their ancestors. The air was filled with the scent of figs ripening on trees and the sound of children playing in the fields, their laughter a constant melody. The elders sat in the shade, telling stories of their childhoods and of ancestors who had tended the same groves. At night, they gathered in the courtyard, the scent of freshly baked bread drifting from the hearth. They would sit on the cool stone floors, weaving colorful rugs and threading intricate patterns into fabric—symbols of olive trees, birds in flight, and strength passed down through generations. It was a simple life, rich in tradition and rooted in history.

In the evenings, the sounds of the *dabka* would fill the air, feet tapping rhythmically to the beat, movements sharp yet fluid, telling stories of resilience. The family would circle the fire, hands clapping in time, their feet sliding across the dirt in a dance passed down through generations. The humor, too, was always present, lightening burdens with shared laughter, even in the darkest moments.

Then, the storm came.

It began with distant explosions, barely audible at first. The family dismissed it as something far away, but the noise grew. Soon, the ground itself seemed to shake. Strange men arrived, their boots heavy on the earth, and in an instant, the village was no longer a place of peace. The men were pulled from their homes, their hands bound behind them, eyes filled with confusion and fear. The women and children fled, scrambling to gather what little they could as the strange men set fire to their homes and fields. The family ran, leaving behind the land that had cradled them for generations, fleeing into the unknown, their hearts heavy with loss.

They found shelter in a camp, where hope was scarce. The tents were crowded, the air thick with dust. They planted olive trees as symbols of the life they had once known, but no matter how many trees they planted, he camp never felt like home. The years passed, each one carrying more pain, more displacement, until the family felt like shadows, their lives slipping further away. Yet, even in the camp, they held onto their traditions. The women continued to sew, their hands deftly embroidering traditional patterns on dresses and intricate designs on cushions. And when the nights grew cold, they circled around the fire, their feet tapping softly, slow *dabka* movements offering a brief escape from their harsh new reality. The humor, too, remained, reminding them that no matter what happened, they would always have each other.

The youngest daughter, a teenager at the time, witnessed a raid that would haunt her forever. The sound of boots hitting the dirt echoed like thunder, and the screams cut through the night. The men were dragged out into the open, beaten, and forced into the backs of trucks, their faces ashen, eyes wide with terror. The girl huddled in the corner of their shelter, clutching her younger brother, unable to look away from the horror unfolding before her. She knew then that peace was no longer a luxury—they could no longer take it for granted.

Years later, the eldest granddaughter, now an adult, stood in the middle of a street, watching as the world she knew was torn apart once more. The sky was dark with smoke, and the ground shook beneath her as explosions ripped through the city. The strange men moved through the streets, rifles raised, and the screams of the people filled the air. She held her child close, her heart pounding, watching the destruction unfold before her. The faces she had known, the family she had grown up with, were being swallowed by the violence. She couldn't protect them, couldn't shield them from the horrors that had once been a part of her own childhood.

Far from the violence, someone sat, watching through a screen. They had heard the stories, seen the images, but never like this—so close, so real. The images blurred into one long stream of brutality—explosions, bodies in the street, children crying for their parents. It was the family they had known through stories, through shared history. And now, they were watching them—helpless, distant, unable to do anything. Guilt tightened around their chest. They felt the weight of their distance and their inability to protect those they loved. They reached for their phone, scrolling through messages, searching for something—anything—that might help. But there was nothing. The helplessness consumed them.

Back in the streets, the family huddled together, their eyes filled with unshakable resolve. The oldest son, now a father himself, clutched his children close, whispering stories of the olive groves, of the hills that had once framed their village. He reminded them that they were more than what had been done to them—that they were survivors, and their roots ran deep, deeper than the violence that sought to erase them. The family stood together, holding onto each other, holding onto the memories of the land they had lost. No matter what the world threw at them, they would endure. Their feet would still move in the *dabka*, their hands would still weave, and their voices would still sing the songs of their ancestors.

The person sat in silence, eyes fixed on the screen. The guilt swirled within them, a heavy weight they couldn't escape. The family was no longer just a memory; they were flesh and blood, struggling to survive in a world that had never cared. The person had learned to speak the language of survival, but it felt hollow now. Wiping away a tear, they wondered how much longer the family could endure before their roots, no matter how deep, were finally torn from the earth.

But the family would not be torn. They would stay, and they would fight. They would hold onto their land and their culture with everything they had, with every beat of their hearts, every thread they wove, every step they took in the *dabka*. They would remain, always, a testament to the strength of their roots, the resilience of their spirit. No matter how far away the world seemed, no matter how distant the person felt, the family's land would always be theirs, and their love for it would never die. Across the miles, in the quiet of the person's room, their heart stirred with a newfound resolve. They would not give up on their family, not as long as they breathed. They would fight in their own way, with the knowledge that even though they couldn't stand beside them, their love and determination would echo through the distance, as sure and steady as the dance of their ancestors' feet.

Shaky Hands Hands Hands

EMMA YOUNG '26

It wasn't until a few hours later that someone came to knock on the door. It was like watching a movie as everything shifted around her. Her body no longer her own, pushed out of context and overwhelmed with an unprecedented hollowness, unsure if her actions were something she could take accountability for. The lifeless body gets carried away by firemen, papers shoved into her periphery, highlighting the syringe that had long since settled into the carpet under the coffee table. All she wanted was to plead for forgiveness as relief washed over her, responsibility something she could let go of; promises shouldn't be allowed to extend past death,

"Can you promise me something?" she murmured

"Mm," again, refusing to acknowledge how I'd swear to anything she'd say without knowing what.

"Can you keep a promise for me?" she clarified a little louder, a reminder she was no longer in sync with me. I turn to a stranger next to me, her eyes glued to the screen, "You'll keep living for me."

Both of us were helplessly stubborn and unready to face things, but it seemed she'd finally lost it, unable to keep up with a mind game, turning over another withering leaf to simplicity. I choose not to respond, denying the secrets she's privy to and rejecting disdain.

She looks up at me for the first time that week, the whole world dancing for a moment in her eyes, a simple world now—conflicted, worn after days of poor sleep and months of unknowingly broken routines.

"..please?"

Having long lost the plot of the movie, I look back at the screen and pretend to watch as if she'd asked another insignificant question, knowing she'd forget by tomorrow in accordance with her fleeting mind.

It was unsettling to learn that the clumsiness had carried meaning: how she'd choked on her food maybe not as a reaction to a joke but unable to swallow properly, how she'd thrown the ball too far maybe not as a lack of practice in her childhood but an inability to coordinate when she let go of the ball, or how it wasn't that she didn't see the ledge like she'd said but involuntarily movement in her feet. Later she received a call that told her all went accordingly; the body was sent to a crematory.

It took only a few steps to collect something that exploded through fragility. A cup of tea, a bowl of soup— it added words to lists, expanding need to a routine and creating a chain of meaning that settled on as a burden. Mountains with chains of information swirled around uselessly, types of bowls, plates and even the old water bottles people say aren't meant to be used once came out of hiding. They piled on top of the counter during her last days, even settling on top of a large box that had been left unopened from the day before, postage that seemed to increase exponentially. There were clothes pushed into corners—all at varying stages of freshly cleaned to less so, with stains made from shaky hands.

Shaky hands. It marked a sign that her nerves were deteriorating, shaky hands that started as a tremble, barely noticeable unless she held out or strained them; shaky hands that had affected her dad and grandmother. She'd played witness to how the family grieved, a constant over time that was shameless in passion and unnerving in desperation, was it cruel how she grew to embrace it as familiar, for her to grow fond of the family in how it got smaller?

The house started to sound hoarse as darkness crept in, taunted by invisible shifts where the colours swirled to take the shape of thoughts. Static background sparked life into numbness, taunting the little girl's cries, stubborn for a dummy which had recently been relocated to a drawer, what had repeatedly kept her tranquil for the night, maybe laced with some drug as she latched on for comfort. Who was to say that she was striking sober this whole time when she'd allowed herself to the perfume that left a lingering presence, introducing her before she'd had a chance to speak her mind?

Admittedly it was a moment of weakness that escalated when she went back for her dummy, a fragment of childhood, which eased irritability and adults marked it as a defect when, frankly, it kept her happy. She sucked on it for a few moments of calamity, flushed with the addiction of adrenaline, euphoria trailing to strike her hunger, not quite sure if she was ready to let go. Later, she'll reminisce about the days when she'd cried out in loneliness without it, having issues with teething and only a small blanket to bandage her.

Sleep finally came to claim her before realisation dawned, dragging herself to rest and perhaps prepared to deal with her staining troubles in the morning.









ARON NATHAN '26

You are going to want to see this

It might save your life

It might be useful

It might help you

Stop scrolling

Just in case

Maybe it's something cute

Or some new product

Or

Or

Or

Stop scrolling

Then keep scrolling

But first

Stop scrolling

Subscribe

Like

Comment your favorite

Stop

Turn around

Go back up

That could have been something cool

Something fun

Something to feed your shortened

attention span

A rush of dopamine

A swipe of the finger

A tap to ignore the time limit, set ages

ago and never followed

An endless cycle

A perpetual addiction

Because we all must

Stop scrolling

We might miss out if we don't

Click and swipe and type

But

Don't scroll

16 Painted Lily by Sonya Malik '27

17 Chateau by Alexandra Burke '25

18 Architecture by Lily Grover '27



I hope that I get known. ANANYA RAO '27





Desire KHADIJA COATS '25

The bright, orange leaves fall from the kids' small, innocent hands. Dry and dehydrated, the leaves crumble, no longer alive like they once were when they hung on branches.

The children parade around their backyard with smiles plastered on their faces.

Their smiles genuine, sheltered by the ignorance that engulfs the top layer of their lips which lies still and unbruised, disguising history.

But their mother watches with tears, not because she is crying tears of joy, but because she is broken with jealousy. She drowns in it. It is too much.

She stares at the pile of fallen leaves. She yearns for her adolescence. She yearns for the people's acceptance of youth. Yet, she is left to suffer in routine and bask in the drowsy atmosphere known as work.

...little did she know, there was an in-between.



Ode to the End Piece of Bread

Ode to the end piece of bread, Seeing you there, Not to be had, You being so delicious, Everyone else being ambitious, Almost ½ more bread, But no one wants you, And nothing to dread?

I see you in your plastic confinement, For doing nothing you couldn't control, No one wanting you, Not being able to be thrown on the coal, Being the guard of the other pieces, Without a coat of many fleeces, You'd be living a life you loved, In the field not high above, Maybe being picked last, And seeing your friends having a blast.

Now, what would you be doing, In the field waiting to be harvested, Beautifully swaying and cooing, Like the old barn owls, we hear, Getting more moldy by the hour, And no one else near. Ode to the end piece of bread, I love how you keep the others pristine, Being praised in the Sistine, Don't be discouraged or sad, Wanting the life you could have had, As a normal piece of bread.







Sydney: After Megan Malachi " an inidescent waters. To sm

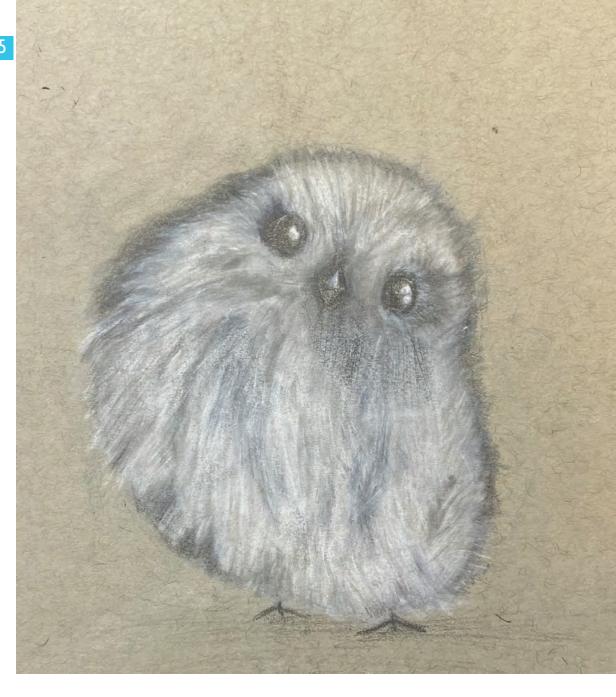
Sydney is never without a feeling, never numb to her senses. Sydney smells like suntan lotion baking on a California beach and fresh Trader Joe's chocolate chip cookies straight from the oven's steam. Sydney feels smooth like her lotion, a combination of almond and cherry components. Sydney is covered in freckles, the same ones that would cover my face if I stayed in the sun like Sydney does. Sydney has three nose rings, two silvers, and a golden septum that I tell her clashes like her beliefs. Sydney pays no mind to my stylistic advice and covers her ears in mixed metals. Each of Sydney's nails, all bitten and chewed, is painted in different hues of purple and green like a well-assorted bowl of grapes. Sydney wears flowing fabric draped across her 24-year-old body displaying youth that awaits wiseness. Sydney feels with her whole heart, she lets emotions in and never breathes them out. Sydney goes to hot yoga twice a week and almost always passes out from the heat. Soon after sunrise, Sydney strolls Southern Pasadena's streets searching for high-priced lattes and something to eat. A man once approached Sydney and asked her what she truly wanted; she walked away without a reply. But later, a glance into the L.A. night sky made it all clear: "I want just one moment where everything stops, another to rewind the clocks. The sins to be rewritten, the virtuous to take pride in my wrath.

To be able to avoid calamity, sail smoothly on iridescent waters. To smell freshly plucked rose petals, well-watered and nourished by the light. To have the kindness of an angel, glowing halos surround my every step. A tamed mind constantly at ease, and obviously, to bring the world peace." Anxiety constantly invades the fortress of her mind. It always seems to strike her like lighting the tallest tree, creating a combination of wind and waves that, if untamed, is the perfect storm for a tsunami. The unkind words Sydney hears stay on her skin like tattoos needled in invisible ink. As Sydney's sister, some of those tattoos were probably made by me. But Sydney was always the artist, forming pots and vases from clay, day after day. Sydney finds her peace in a ceramic studio. But Sydney lives in a state of earthquakes, so her decorated mugs and plates have often clashed with the floor, something Sydney now sees as their inevitable fate. When I saw Sydney last, the earth began to grumble, hungry for her things. She ran to her cabinets of pottery, as the tv fell behind her. As I watched Sydney with her back turned to the shattered screen, I saw a true artist admiring her floral details and eloquent designs. I saw Sydney in her true element. I saw our mom in her too, with dark hair and a button nose, kindness, and the perfect subject for prose.

- 22 Glassblowing by Aron Nathan '2623 Beach No. 74 by Madeline Everest '26









City before cruelness, before being anxious City like a flower growing City trotting around Lake Erie City paralyzed City with depression City of a long road that I walk down City of angry people fighting to live City of my grandmother's macaroni City of my family City of my life

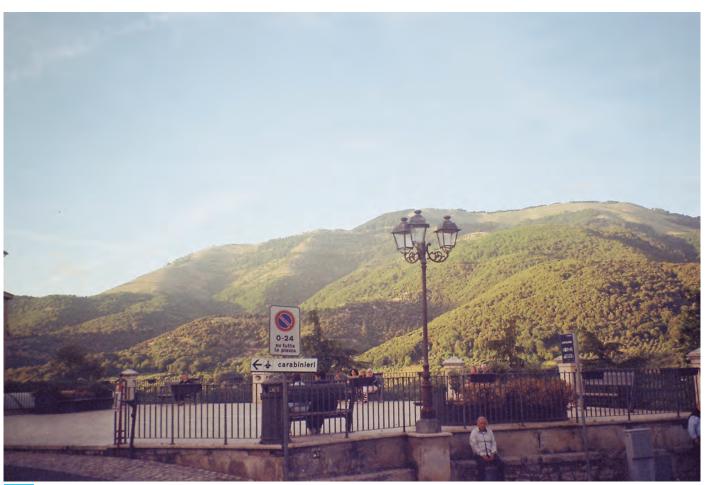
The Ballerina and the STORYTELLER

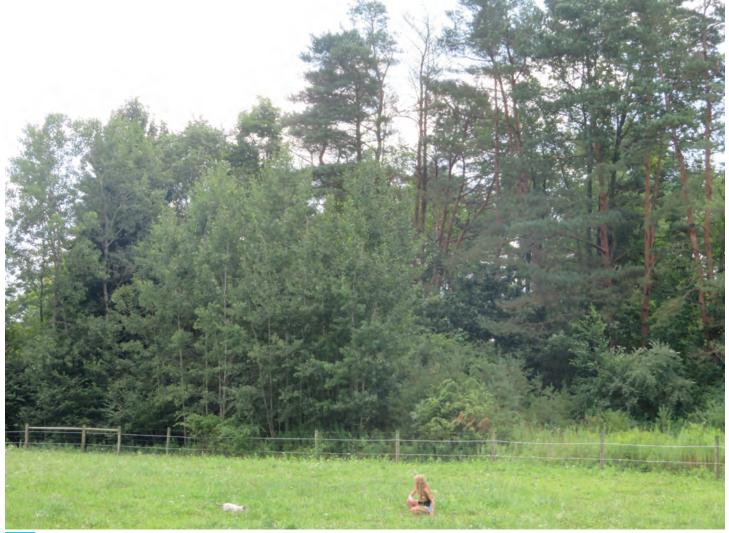
CHRISTINA HUYNH NGUYEN '28

There exists a place in my mind where I dream of myself on stage. A place where I move along to the soft melodies, as the tan-colored shoes grasp tightly onto my feet, anchoring them. I imagine the gracefulness of my steps on the big stage, standing tall on my toes. I leap, and my feet land first, waiting for my arms to gracefully hug my torso wrapped by a white corset.

> The quick turns relieve me of my thoughts, my life outside the stage. All that's left is for me to enjoy the moment. Even if it's just in my imagination. I travel across the stage. I sense the crowd's eyes on me, followed by the brightness of the spotlight.

I can finally breathe now. I let my arms reach for the top, I won't let the sky be my limit. It's everything that I'll ever wish for. At night, as I close my eyes to the darkness surrounding, it's all I see.





ARIA DAWSON '28

I, Too, Matter:

a poem inspired by Langston Hughes' "I, Too"

I, too, matter.

I am a flower

with the purpose of spreading beauty and light around. But I'm cursed with the ability to shrivel in the cold, stomped on those who think I serve no purpose.

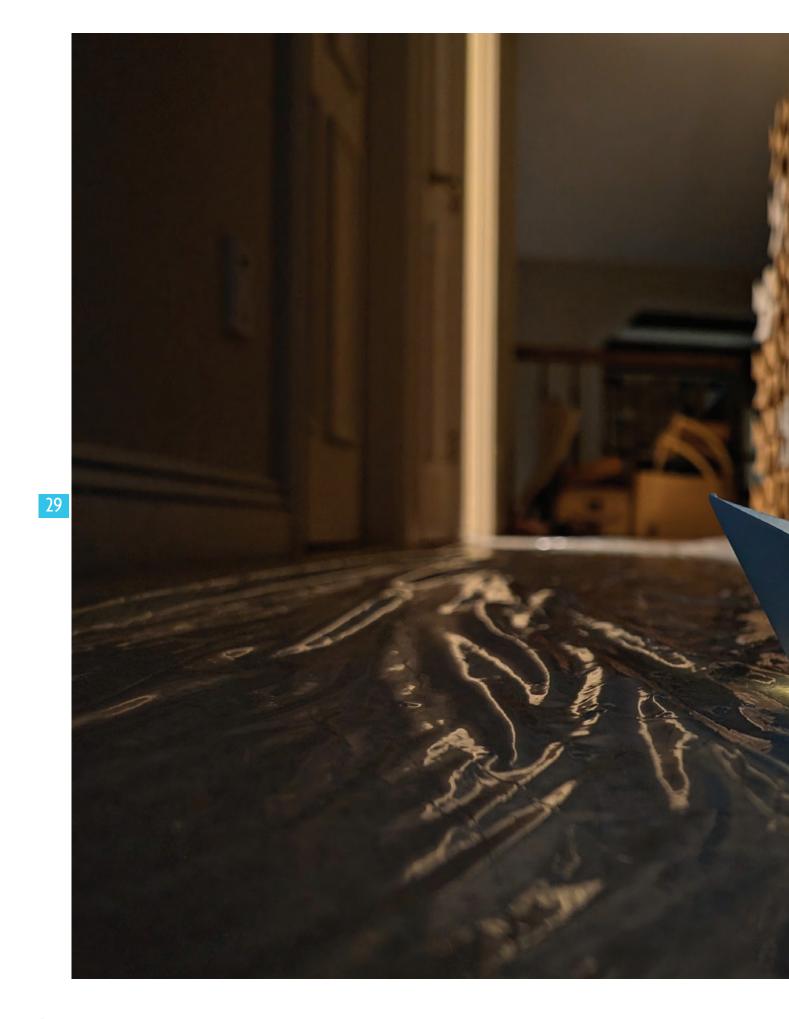
But throughout all, I thrive. With the strength of those around me. For I am of reflection of those who came before me, their resilience and strength.

I am a flower, with beautiful brown skin and a crown of hair.

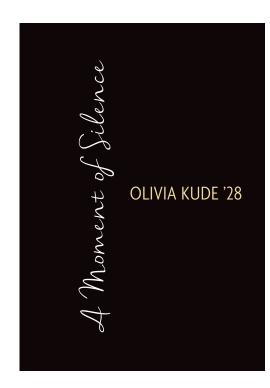
I, too, matter.

27 Meadow by Chloe Eghobamien '2528 Mystery of Mountains by Blake Cody '25

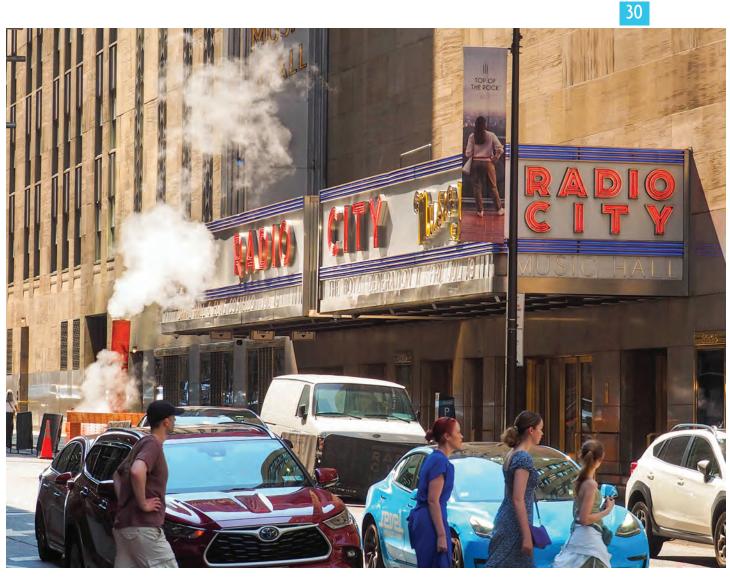








I am flying high over the city. Over the honking of horns. Over the squealing of tires. Over the shouts of road rage. Oop, someone looks ready to throw a punch maaayyyybee I shouldn't take that route. Let's pass by the park instead, through the tall trees Through the shrieking children Through the winding trails But wait, what do I see? Two people sitting on opposite sides of a bench. And although there is an absence of words they both appear content in their pocket of peace, their small moment of silence within the bustling sounds of the city. Shhhhh!



PARALLEL LIVES PARALLEL LIVES

CLAIRE HUDSON '25

There is a quiet in my heart, Born from moments left unspoken. A songbird rests on the tree, Singing with the rise of death, While raindrops fall beneath the gray beyond— A place no one sees.

It feels like someone Who never says exactly what they mean, When the sky should be full of cheer, Yet it carries only a life without dreams.

The storm stirs as I move north, Strolling across the heavens, A face I no longer see. I wouldn't look for you, But I don't want to lose that chance.

Who am I now? Altered, changed—unrecognizable. You cannot find me here.

Yet, another world beckons, Running parallel to ours. We stand on opposite lines, Looking across at each other From time to time.

30 Radio City by Maggie Reef '25

31 Les fleurs en noir et blan by Gauri Saxena '27



ANONYMOUS

Running towards the sun Stinging in my lungs green flames in my mind so close to the fire (too close)

CHORUS:

But I'm not some loser who can get walked over The Heat from my body, it gets colder and colder I realize that I'll always be outgrown It's over, it's over, I'm over it.

'Cause My identity isn't identical to you My identity isn't identical to you

> You are people's light Shining too bright

Greek statues In my head Akin to demigoddesses When I think of you

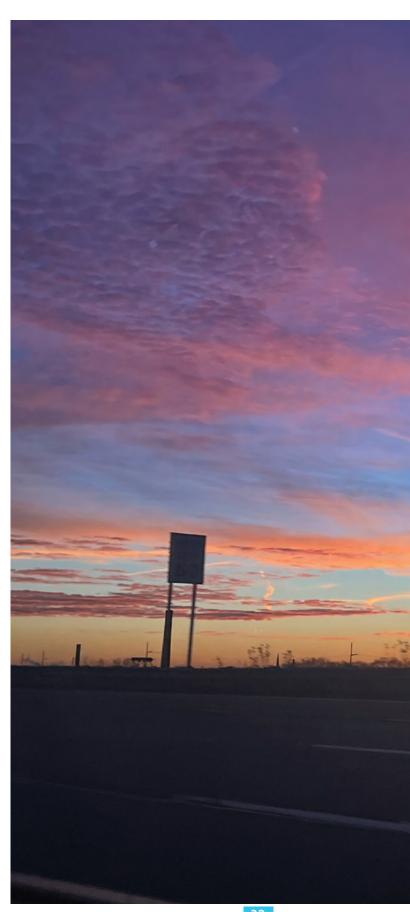
This jealousy Has been consuming me And I'm through **REPEAT CHORUS**

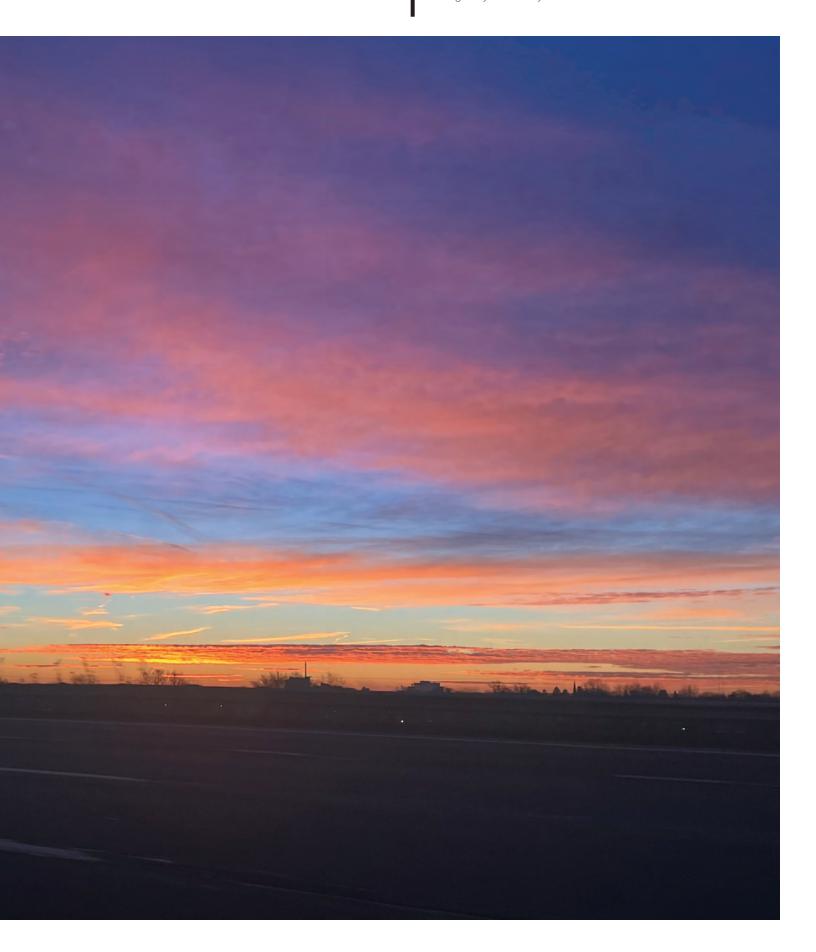
petals all over raining down on me I have now embraced my Identity And realize I'm just as pretty

> I've become the moon I was always the fool To be authentic Is what really matters My identity is truth















Oh Bibibop how I love you

HANNAH GOLDBERG '27

The Ballad of HAMLET

SAM BOYCE '25 AND LILY KATTAN '25

Midnight ghost, whispers low, "Your uncle struck the final blow." Poisoned king, stolen crown, What's rotten here won't settle down.

Mother's wedding, barely cried, Now she's sleeping by his side. Oh, Denmark's prince has lost his way; To revenge or just decay?

To be or not to be. Madness, fate, or destiny? The stage is set, the truth will shine, Watch his guilt in real time! Dagger drawn, poisoned wine, One by one, we cross the line...

Ophelia sings, the river calls, Drowned in madness, she's lost it all. Laertes swears, swords will clash, One last duel, one last flash.

Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Played the game, but never learned. Letters switched, now who's betrayed? Death is just one move away...

To be or not to be. Madness, fate, or destiny? Yorick laughs, the grave is wide, Something's waiting deep inside. Dagger drawn, poisoned wine, One by one, we cross the line...

Horatio, you must live on, Tell my tale when I am gone. The throne will fall, the war begins, Denmark pays for Claudius' sins...

The curtain falls, no time to weep, Now I rest in death's cold sleep. Fortinbras is marching in, Another king, another sin...

To be or not to be. Madness, fate, or destiny? Yorick laughs, the grave is wide, Something's waiting deep inside. Dagger drawn, poisoned wine, One by one, we cross the line...



35 Fishbowl by Celia Bentrott '25 36 Beach Trio by Ally Hudson '25





